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Chapter 1: The Nighthawk Star

Is it wrong to have no meaning? Is it wrong if it is not needed? She used to question herself in the past.

Isn't it alright to be wrong? Isn't it alright to be mistaken? I prayed like this in the past.

That is why, this might be inevitable.

"I like you. Please go out with me."

"Err... Ah... Sure."

To sum up the current situation, after Yukimura Kusunoki pointed out, I realised that I bore feelings towards Rika Shiguma which went beyond that of friends. I loved Rika. At the same time, I realised the true meaning when she said "Let's just be friends from now on." Although deep down I was in strong denial of these feelings.

Toward the me who received and was still recovering from a huge shock, Yukimura stood unwavering like a magnificent wall. It was that unwavering attitude that allowed her to kiss and confess.

In the middle of an absent minded state, I had unknowingly given her the okay.

It was a matter of time before the events really settled in for me.

Huh..? What did I just say? Eh? Ehhhhhhhhh?

Yeah, byeeeeeee!!

If possible, I wanted to disappear from this situation entirely.

"Thank you very much."

A gentle smile surfaced on Yukimura's face making the forceful kiss

just now seem like a lie.

I panicked and stood up, struggling to come to terms with, let alone resolve this entire incident.

My head was in a mess, and I was desperate to find a way out.

“No, Yukimura, wa-wait, not now!”

“I’ll refuse.” Yukimura said gently yet clearly.

Of course.

If “not now” could be said for me to easily avoid this situation, then surely she would not have confessed at the start.

“B..But I, before, didn’t you declare that you did not like any members of the Neighbour’s Club!” I imagined a frustrated Sena shouting this should this news reach her. Yes, I swore to Sena when she confessed to me previously. And yes, I intended to uphold that promise.

Sena, Yukimura and Rika. If I harboured feelings towards any of the Neighbour’s Club members, I was not sure that I was able to maintain the status quo.

That was supposed to be my plan. where both sides coerced each other to be patient.

“I see.” Yukimura quickly said.

“Do you understand?”

“Yes.”

Nodding, Yukimura stretched out her hand towards me.

Hmm?

Yukimura snatched the letter of club resignation off my hand.

“The name was not written so it was a nice time anyway.”

“Don’t tell me you... The Neighbour’s Club...”

“Yeah, I was planning on leaving the club.”

Yukimura declared that without a shred of hesitation.

When I swore that I could not get along well with the members of the Neighbour’s Club, it was if I were to bring in love affairs into the world of the Neighbour’s Club. Evidently, dealing with love issues wasn’t my strong suit. I simply wanted the friendly atmosphere to remain.

When Kate confessed a little while ago, I gave it serious thought. If one member was gone from the club, the problem would disappear. Therefore, I should withdraw from the club. That is right, that is absolutely right , or so I thought.

Between Yukimura and Sena, the choice was obvious. Yukimura was the only member that did not truly yearn for friends. Despite that, she was always heading straight on her own path, as if that was second nature for her. On the contrary, for someone lacking mental fortitude like me, imitating this kind of lifestyle was beyond me.

“... As I thought... You...”

I already thought of Yukimura as a charming girl.

I really liked Yukimura in a romantic sense.

I liked her but, she was not the one I liked most.

“The one I like most is –“

“No problem” Yukimura interrupted me, replying in her usual calm demeanour.

“It’s alright. I consulted Yusa Yusa on this. As long as aniki likes me in the end, it doesn’t matter whoever aniki likes most. Also it seems that through your interactions with her, she has developed a deep affection for you.

It was questionable how Aoi could give love advice like an expert,

but, leaving that aside, along with the second hand confession, this was like the manly supreme Lord reigning during the turbulent times.

This manliness is what my effeminate self finds most attractive about Yukimura.

However, I was unprepared to be called on such an occasion. “Before that, I would like to talk to Rika.”

Personally, I think I am a sorry excuse of a person, having to rely on others for my own problems.

Facing a person like me, Yukimura’s response was: “I thought you would say that.”

Yukimura took out her smartphone from her bag.

“.....?”

Ignoring my confused reaction, Yukimura swiftly operated her smartphone with nimble finger movements.

“I take that you are really fine with this.”

Yukimura seemed to play a recording, and it opened with her voice.

“Stop repeating yourself.”

“.....!”

What came next was the voice of Rika as if she was crushing her feelings.

“I just had a conversation with Rika-dono.”

The recording paused and Yukimura continued.

“I have informed Rika that I was going to confess to aniki . She also knew the conversation was being recorded and allowed it.”

The recording continued playing.

“Kodaka and I are just friends. Confessing, love, just do whatever you

like. All this won't sway the friendship between us...!"

"I see... Then I will do just that."

Yukimura's voice sounded increasingly shocked.

"Does Rika-dono really think that friendship is more precious than love?"

"I think so. At least, the friendship between Kodoka and I- will not lose to the likes of love." I could imagine Rika saying that whilst biting her lip in frustration.

"Love is a nuisance to friendship." These were the exact words I remembered saying to Yukimura not too long ago.

"I do not understand" Yukimura replied somewhat pitifully.

"Yukimura-kun with her brain filled with love will never understand."

"It looks that way. ...I would never understand the blabbering of a Chunnibyou ¹ "

"...Coming from a supreme romantic love principle of a damned bitch. It's a miracle that Kodoka and I became friends. Kodoka would do anything for friendship. Don't underestimate scientists, snob. The instincts of living things and Nature's providence, common people's shitty sense of value and common sense too, these things transcend us."

"...Isn't it Rika-dono, that is being an unscientific dreamer. And, saying damned bitch is too much. I am still an innocent young woman ."

"Sry . Seems like it became a cut tehe (• ω <)Are you angry?"

"Relatively, quite..... But, you finally showed me your true self. I have a feeling that I can become friends with the Rika-dono today."

"...On the other hand, I, Rika, will refuse. I don't feel that we can get along well. ...You are... too girlish... It's frightening."

“I- have found that manliness transcends gender.”

“...Ain’t that deep. ...As expected, it looks like we won’t get along. If you are present, I will be overwhelmed. ”

Replying to the ironical smile plastered on Rika’s face, Yukimura said: “I see, that’s a shame.”

The recording ended with a “pi” sound, probably made when Yukimura left the Science room.

From the start to the end their uninteresting exchange was a battle - a clash about their own current foundations.

“...As you can see, Rika-dono is already well aware.”

Yukimura kept her smartphone, while I was still reeling in from the effect of a combo attack.

“.....Aren’t Rika and aniki congenial?” Yukimura said, probably trying to evoke a response from me. The way she spoke was with a mix of amazement and pity. She seemed to be slightly envious, and she let out a small bitter smile.

“Congenial..?”

“Being restricted by the ideals to the point of being suicidal.”³

How cruel..... But certainly, that might be true.

That was likely why we got along strangely well from the moment we met. Becoming friends was inevitable. That Rika believed that friendship has more value over love. No..... She was trying to believe so. That was also the case for me. But surely, more than anyone else, we understood that breaching the gender gap in a friendship was just impossible.

Finally, my disorganised and still-confused brain was able to string together a sentence. “.....I, will treasure her as an important friend?”

“Just friends ”, was a getaway line that I would not condone. I felt that friendship was arriving at one milestone and does not necessarily

arrive at the bonding stage of being lovers. This was why I felt that while Rika and I were at the point where we were more than friends but less than lovers, I would not abandon her.

“I don’t mind leaving it like that for today.” Yukimura quickly accepted my cruel words.

“No, erm, it’s not ‘today’, it should be ‘forever’ right.....?”

“If it’s something like that. it can be done.”

Yukimura let out a gentle smile.

“Ugh, concretely speaking? For example between your promise and Rika’s promise, I would bet on Rika’s first.”

“Friendship is important too, but above all else, I think it is inevitable.”

“Eh, ah, yea..... I see.....”

This overwhelming tolerance to accept everything.

Superhuman-like resolve and confidence.

She is not an opponent I am able to stand up against after all.

“.....I, I will be in your care.”

Towards I, who had finally resigned and lowered my head, Yukimura bowed cutely.

“Same here. aniki – Kodaka-senpai.”

And so I, for the first time since being born, had a lover.

Yukimura route HAPPY END!!

.....As if it was a given to leave out the abnormally heavy atmosphere in reality, that was waiting to be accepted.

In this world where routes do not exist, and the moving BGM together with the rolling credits trick people into thinking everything

has a somewhat good feeling to it, I find myself walking alongside Yukimura along a dim and silent hallway. There was only one place for the 2 of us to go. There was only one reason for us to be there. I had accepted to date Yukimura and this was one of the responsibilities that I had to the other group members. The least I could do was to accept whatever punishments Sena and Yozora had in store for me.

Easier said than done. Especially with an atmosphere this heavy.

But that being said, the atmosphere is heavy.

It was too heavy.

All these must be spoken directly from my mouth, and thereafter, I have resigned myself to the duty of accepting all the belittlement, beating and pricking.

But that being said, the atmosphere is heavy.

It was too heavy.

Testing the waters, I opened the door ever so slightly and peered through the ajar door.

A similar scene as before – Sena wearing a dress together with Yozora dressed in her jacket, sitting there, neither conversing with each other nor doing anything in particular.

On Yozora's hair was a certain sparkling crescent-shaped hairpin, a birthday present from Sena.

“.....Even so, Kodaka sure is late”

Sena spoke suddenly, making my heart jump.

“Even after I mailed to come right after he was done being lectured ⁴.”

“He might not be let off that easily. It was such a big rampage after all.....”

Yozora said indifferently toward a sighing Sena.

Huh?

Mail?

I instinctively fished out my cell phone from my pocket. “Ugh.....?!”
The sound slipped as if my voice was leaking.

The back compartment containing the battery was broken with a crack and the screen looked like a spiderweb. Unsurprisingly, the display no longer illuminated, even after pressing the power button.

The smashed up phone was clearly broken. Being an out of production model, repairs were unlikely. I guess This was already an old model which is no longer produced, so I guess a replacement was due.

“Meat, when Kodoka comes, I’m gonna confess.”

Lucky, I lost my balance due to shock and almost sent the door flying inwards. I wasn’t sure my body could handle any more surprise attacks.

“I see.”

Sena did not look the least bit shaken with surprise. “Finally, you and I are at the same place.”

Yozora replied to Sena’s smile with one of her own. It was touching, as if the 2 of them have finally came to understand each other. There was no servility or strong acts at all, just an overwhelming smile overflowing with positivity, trying to grab hold of the bright future.

“You can only display your composure now Meat.I have a feeling that my present self can deal with anything. Friends, the man I like, I will get them all with my own hands.”

“Idiot. That’s my line.”

Sena smiled boldly, “.....There will be no grudges no matter who wins.”

“Yeah.”

The 2 of them handled the rather serious topic without any signs of awkwardness, indicative of the strength of their friendship. It was actually a refreshing exchange.

If I was not related to the problem, I would have rooted for either one of them.

“.....”



I shut the door, careful to minimise the noise produced. Many deep breaths were taken in an attempt to calm myself down. However, the dripping sound of cold sweat was indicative of otherwise.

.....Haah.....Seriously what should I do.....

In this current situation, rush into the clubroom and.....?

Admittedly, the timing left much to be desired, but it was better to settle this sooner rather than later. If I had the superhuman-like courage to enter the room and tell Yozora and Sena, “I am now going out with Yukimura”, I would already become a Harem King by now.

Click!

Yukimura seemed to be fed up with my indecisiveness and decided to take matters into her own hands. She opened the door with vigour, startling the 2 ladies occupied in the room.

“Wha?! Ehh?~ Oi?!”

Whoa as expected of Yukimura, she was not afraid!

She calmly did ⁵ what I could not do. Once again I was left in awe of Yukimura’s strong will, not that that was the time to be admiring it.

“Yu, Yukimura?! And also..... Kodoka.....!”

Leaving no time for the bewildered members to compose themselves, Yukimura announced: “I have started going out with Kodoka-senpai.”

Casting a sidelong glance at the absentminded two, I filled in my name on the application of resignation from clubs and handed it over to Yozora.

“Well, that is what’s going on?”

“Eh.....? Huh.....? Ehhh?!”

Yozora’s eyes shifted from the resignation form, to Yukimura’s face, to mine.

“Wa-, Wha-, Wha is the meaning of this?!” Sena questioned me, recovering from the attack.

“How do I put it.....It looks like.....I was conquered.....” I said while tilting my neck and making a vague expression.

“I don’t get what you mean?!” Yozora shouted. Of course things wouldn’t be as simple to explain.

“Give a proper explanation!” Sena pressed. I tried to give an explanation even though the situation had yet to settle in my head.

I brought up the promise of not going out with anyone from the Neighbour’s Club, and Yukimura noticed a particular loophole. Should she leave the club, that promise would still be upheld. As such, there was no reason to refuse her proposal.

“No, no way.....” Yozora placed her hands from the table to her head and hanged her head.

“.....I didn’t think Yukimura would Ack..... on the terms of acting friendly with Meat”

“Acting friendly?! You just said acting friendly?!”

“Ahh no, that was just a figure of speech.....” Yozora gave her explanation in a panic when Sena widened her eyes.

“Anyway Kodoka! Are you really alright with this!?”

This was the question I absolutely dreaded to answer. Yet, the situation demanded it of me. There was no point in lying anyway. “.....Honestly.....I have no confidence in clearly affirming ‘That is fine’. Just that, it’s also true that I am not opposed to going out with Yukimura..... I thought of wanting to respond to this person’s straightforward feelings.Also-”

I hesitated for a while, before continuing “.....By going out, I am looking forward to whether something will change.”

Through various troubles from entering the Neighbour’s Club leading up to now, I have come to fully realise that I was overwhelmingly inexperienced. My interpersonal relationship experience was lacking as compared to the amount of experience other high schoolers would have accumulated in the 17 years of their life. During the packed

time after joining the Neighbour's Club, during the vital times, I always tried to avoid interactions. As a result, I failed to gain experience as a normal high schooler.

In conclusion – I should have been more involved with people.

No matter how scary, hateful, embarrassing, hurtful and how much I wanted to flee, I think I should have been more involved with people. Crying and laughing, being hurt and hurting others, liking others and being liked by others, hating others and being hated, having fun and getting into quarrels, being in love and having an unrequited love, we could not have done without them.

“.....I feel disrespectful towards Yukimura as I am going out with her for the sake of my own growth.”

“That goes without saying.” Yukimura nodded without hesitation.

“.....” Yozora stared straight at me in a silent manner.

I also met Yozora's gaze straight on.

After a short moment of silence, Yozora heaved a sigh and averted her eyes.

“.....Do whatever you want. She is a damn riajuu”

“Yozora.....”

“But remember! I will not give up!”

Yozora pointed sternly at Yukimura, while tears were welling in her eyes.

“I have waited for 10 years..... Letting you borrow him for awhile is no big deal! Enjoy it for the short time it lasts, fuhahahahahaha!!”

That was clearly Yozora putting a strong front, I did not overlook her words causing Yukimura's body to shiver for a moment.

A strong act of smiling with all her might. That was our final hope ⁶, left for us who are like the protagonist of a story being unable to

become strong or kind.

Continuing on, I glanced towards Sena.

When our eyes met, Sena too sighed and questioned me, seemingly unsatisfied with my response.

“.....Why is it Yukimura. It wasn't me, it wasn't Yozora..... it also wasn't Rika who got along best with you..... This would certainly be a guaranteed shitty game should this was a Galge ⁷ .”

“It's not a Galge” like the cutting of the Gordian Knot ⁸ , Yukimura answered Sena's question.

“I am not a childhood friend like Yozora-anego, unlike Sena-anego I am not a fiancée arranged by the family to marry, I am also not like Rika-dono who has achieved a fateful meeting – I am an ordinary girl. There is no hidden meaning, it was also not inevitable, no flags, no routes, it was a girl in love and above all, she worked hard with an objective in mind and reached her destination as a result.”

Sena looked daunted by Yukimura's bold declaration. But immediately after, a smile of ferocity surfaced, “Even so, I will have the last laugh.”

“I shall accept your challenge” Sena said with Yukimura staring at her.

“.....Well then, excuse me. I have been in your care up till now” Yukimura bowed deeply, turned back, and left the clubroom. I also left the clubroom, following her lead.

Just before the door closed, I caught sobbing sounds. However, the me right now had no right to help them. Left alone with my thoughts, it dawned on me that my own decision caused someone else to cry. All I could was bite my lip, enduring the heavy burden ⁹ and pain as I move forward.

Notes:

1 – The nickname of Aoi Yusa

2 – This is intentional

3 – There is a wordplay here, she used 自爆 - Suicide and 自縛 - Restricted by one's circumstances. Both are read as jibaku but 爆 (baku) - bomb, 縛 (baku) - bind -- You know bleach?

4 – As in talk seriously or reprovngly to (someone)

5 – In the process, getting rid of, because Kodoka did not have to do it again

6 – Written as 武器 (weapon), read as きぼう (hope)

7 – Visual Novel for all ages

8 – An extremely difficult or involved problem (from Google), Extra Reading

9 – Refers to causing Yozora and Sena to cry

Chapter 2: Father's Return

Two days after the Christmas Party, students of Saint Chronica Samaritan School was notified about the punishment of the Yankee Hasegawa's Massive Violence Incident.

The punishment as decided by the teacher-in-charge was as follows: apart from submitting a reflection letter, I was also suspended for a week effective after the winter break. Entering the school was forbidden, additionally. Moreover, I was also barred from participating in the Skiing Induction Course.

The advice given to me was to stay at home and behave myself during the remainder of the winter break.

Anyway, that is the punishment against me.

Not surprisingly, Sena contacted the headmaster and tried to negotiate a lighter punishment, but that didn't turn out well.

"It's alright not to hold back y'know? You did all that..... for the sake of helping Yozora and I....." Sena tried to encourage me.

".....No, it's ok. It was a fact that I assaulted people..... I think I should bear the responsibility for my own actions."

"I see..... Kodoka, you've changed a little."

It goes without saying that going on a date with my new girlfriend, hanging out with friends and attending club activities were all out of the question, for now.

.....By the way, the talk about me leaving the club was postponed. Not only did Yukimura take away my withdrawal letter, but I could not meet Yozora's expectations. But I still don't feel comfortable being in the Neighbour's Club. However, by leaving the club along with Yukimura, the can of worms called love affairs won't be opened.

Not that Sena accepted it when I tried expressing my earnest feelings over the telephone, though.

“ DON’T JOKE AROUND! ”

“I’m not joking. No, I’m seriously thinking about the welfare of the members of the Neighbour’s Club.”

“That’s an unnecessary concern, stupid Kodoka.” Sena affirmed that with a strong tone. “.....I like you. Yozora likes you too. The fact that you are going out with Yukimura won’t change, I think Yozora and I will quarrel over this. But what’s wrong with that.”

“What’s wrong is that-“

“What’s wrong with quarrelling, we’re friends after all”

“Th”

I could only hold my breath.

“But not grand like intimate friends. Quarrelling is like the normal operations of a machine. That’s us, and a normal daily sight for the Neighbour’s Club. Our relationship won’t break over only a serious fight, I really think so. That’s why you don’t need to be considerate, whether you leave the Neighbour’s Club or not, we will fight all out! That’s why it’s pointless! It’s an unnecessary concern! You’ll be just fine obediently behaving like you have up till now, and be targeted by Yozora and I!”

As expected of Sena, she says what she wants regardless of the other party.

“Anyway even if both of you leave the Neighbour’s Club, the time for both of you to flirt will only increase, won’t that lead, even more so, to Yukimura alone winning! That kind of situation is unforgivable! Understand?! Okay this conversation is over!”

And the one-sided conversation ended just like that, with no space for me to reply to Sena. I’m really no match for her...

As abruptly as this whole incident took place, Father returned from

America only a day into the punishment.

“Yo, have you been well?”

“Huh?! Ehh!? Wha, Eh!? Eh.....!”

His sudden presence left me speechless, only producing unfathomable noises. Hayato Hasegawa had returned without any prior notice.

“Fa, fa, father.....?”

Kobato, sitting at the table with me, was unable to grasp the situation too. She simply stared wide-eyed at the man she had not seen in ages.

“Ohh, you have been well my little angel Kobato-chan! You have grown even cuter!”

“Fugyuu...” Father hugged Kobato, who was now in a stiffened state, and rubbed his cheeks against hers as if it was the most natural thing to do. The troubled look on Kobato was a cry for help to me to stop the intimate act. Not that I was particularly worried about that, however.

“Well, errr... Father, err... Why? Why are you here?” I finally addressed the elephant in the room.

“About why, this is my home. That’s why. Of course I will return.” Hayato replied as if that was an obvious answer, showing an oddly affable expression with that suntanned face of his, despite having those evil-looking eyes.

“No it’s not that! Why was it in such a hurry?! Without contacting us!” I replied, still flabbergasted.

“Hmm? Ah, come to think of it I forgot to call.” Laughing as he said that, his expression changed to one of kindness. “Somehow I heard from that Zaki fella that you have caused a violence incident at school. So I flew here.”

“.....!”

It was only just yesterday that the punishment was handed down by

the school. Considering the travel time from America to here, it was very likely that he literally flew here after just hearing about the incident.

Somehow, hearing that, I lost all my energy. Father was always like this even in the past. His work life was such that he would fly and return at a moment's notice. But it was wrong to assume he put work ahead of family. Whenever Kobato or myself had developed a fever, or got into incidents, he would always rush back regardless of his busy schedule. Somewhere along the way, I started seeing my father as cool.

"So, is everything alright?"

"Yeah. I was only suspended from school for a while."

"I see. That's good. Alright, I'm going to eat too! Is there any portion for me?" Seems like he wants to close the topic.

"There should be enough for about one person if we combine it with the leftovers from breakfast..... Hey, don't you want to ask for the specifics?"

"Hmm. Well, I heard most of the details from Zaki; it's about you covering for a girl, where you then committed the violence. Man, look at you trying to act cool." Father brushed away the entire incident as if it was nothing, laughing as his face heated up.

".....Well, be sure to tell me if there's anything troubling you. 'Cause I'll be Japan for about a year."

"Eh, seriously?!"

"Father's coming back to our home?!"

"Both of you are taking examinations next year. I feel bad for always counting on Zaki, so that's what I decided. Well, I haven't done any procedures yet so I'll probably have to come and go occasionally, but basically I'll be here until you all graduate during the end of the year." Seems like all the time away from home didn't make Hayato forget how to be a parent. "Well, to you, it might be but a shame, because it'll become difficult for you to bring your girlfriend over if

your parent is at home.”

“.....That is true.” Those words came out of me without any thought, much to my demise.

“Then again, you didn’t have a girlfriend yet, wait, huh!? You’ve already have one!?”

“B, bro!? Bro Bru Broh!?!?” similarly shocked, Kobato could only let out sounds of astonishment.

Come to think of it, there were no reports about Kobato hanging out with Yukimura, so there was no way she would have heard about it from her.

Throughout the entire explanation, Kobato was wide-eyed, as if she couldn’t believe her brother could land himself a girlfriend. From details of my suspension, to details of my girlfriend. Man I can’t catch a break....

Thus, the everyday life of this family of three continues.

Chapter 3: New Year

Ah, the new year. While I can proudly admit that yesteryear was by far the most interesting year for me, it doesn't seem like this year was going to disappoint either. And to start it all off we had New Year visits.

And as such, the newly reunited Hasegawa family woke up early to make their way to the Kashiwazaki household.

“PEGASUS-KUN! LET’S PLAY!”

What an enthusiastic way announce one’s arrival. Was that even the right thing to say during a house visit, though?

Moreover, when visiting a person you haven’t seen of late?

But then again, this was Father. A man who didn’t prelude his arrival home. A man with such an easygoing nature that it wasn’t an odd statement to make, after all.

But I digress. Or rather, I was forcibly brought back to reality. In the midst of a mental debate about a simple greeting, I seemed to have missed the hurried footsteps of Pegasus-san, who had forcibly opened the front entranceway door.

...

Pegasus-san had come to greet us.

I haven’t even had breakfast and the new year’s already hit the ground running.

“Yo, Zaki. Happy N’Year,” Father offered a light greeting, seemingly unfazed by Pegasus-san’s getup.

“Ha, Ha-Ha-Ha-Ha-Hayato...! Why are you here?!” Pegasus-san

barely managed to scrape together a coherent sentence.

“Hmm. Well, it’s the new Year after all. Somehow or rather I came to give my New Year’s greeting,” replied Father nonchalantly as if it was the most natural response.

“Th, That’s not it! I mean how long has it been since you returned to Japan?!”

...

Seems like he didn’t even bother informing his close friend when he returned.

“Hmm, about 5 days ago? I plan to stay here until at least these guys graduate.”

“Phew～♪ Sheesh, you are always sudden huh ♪ In the first place, don’t you think that suddenly coming without considering the circumstances of other people is an act of thoughtlessness ♪ If you had contacted me in advance, I could have prepared-”

“Well ya place is always busy on New Year’s so we came first thing in the morning. Was that bad in any way? In that case we’ll head back then. We only came for a short greeting only after all.”

“Wh-Wh-Who said that, you idiot ♪ Since all of you are already here, why go back after just a short greeting ♪ Come in for a meal, you idiot ♪”

Quietly, from the shadow of Pegasus-san (whose face was now red with anger?), Stewardess Stella-san appeared.

“Well then, Hasegawa-sama, please head inside. Master, please do something about that unsightly outfit first before heading to the dining hall.”

And as such, the first house visit for the Hasegawa family was underway.

As expected, the dining table was lined with a large variety of food, no doubt for the New Year’s. And sitting in a corner nonchalantly was

a sleepy-faced Sena. Though that all changed when she saw us. Well, specifically Kobato.

“Ko-ko-ko-Kobato-chan?! To be able to meet Kobato-can on New Year’s Day, what kind of miracle is this?! It’s not a dream right?! Right?! Ko. Ba. To. Chan~!”

Sena then launched her full-on deredere attack on Kobato, much to her disapproval.

Of course, to Father, who did not understand the nature of their relationship, confusion was expected.

“Oi...Kodaka. Is this girl perhaps...”

“...Sena. The daughter of Pegasus-san, Sena.”

“Ah...Kodaka. And...?” Seems like Sena was too engrossed (forcibly) cuddling Kobato to notice us.

“My dad.”

“Dad?!”

Upon that startling discovery, Sena’s face turned beet red and she swiftly departed from Kobato.



She plastered an awkward smile in a futile attempt at a good first impression.

“Um... N-Nice to meet you...!”

“It’s not really the time for ‘Nice to meet you’ is it, though?” I tsukkomi’d.

Father grasped Sena’s hand as he introduced himself. “Your dad’s friend, as well as the father of these guys, Hayato. Nice to meet you too.”

“Ah, yes... Nice to meet you too.”

Handshake over, an unusually nervous Sena came over to me and whispered. “Wait!, Is that person really your father?!”

“? What’s the meaning of that?”

“Because both of you are so unlike each other. His communication skills are so high.”

Tch. There’s nothing I can say to refute that.

At this point, Pegasus-san made his entrance into the dining room, this time donning a formal top, decorated with his family’s crest and a formal divided skirt. Following a formal New Year’s greeting, breakfast with the Hasegawa and Kashiwazaki families, along with Stella-san, began.

I was eyeing the luxuriously made Zouni ¹, especially since we didn’t have breakfast before leaving home. Perhaps more importantly was that the hasegawa family didn’t have the tradition of making New Year’s cuisine. It also went without saying that this was the first time we could experience a New Year’s feast.

“Kodaka-kun. Uhm, I’m sorry.” Pegasus-san abruptly apologised.

“A-About?”

“It is about your punishment. I am unsure of the full details because Sena didn’t really explain much, but you fought to protect my daughter and her friend, right?”

“Please pay it no mind. It is true that I acted violently...”

That said, I was happy that Sena referred to Yozora as a “friend”.

“I see... But suspension from school will probably affect entrance exams. Not to mention that it’ll be more difficult to be like Hayato and aim for recommendations to specific schools...”

...Really now? Honestly, recommendations hadn’t even crossed my mind. If I’m not wrong, the school seems to have a recommendation limit for the university I’m aiming for. It wasn’t as if I was specifically aiming for it, but still having one possibility cut off hurts.

Well all I could do now was to strengthen my resolve. “I, I mentioned it before, but please do not be concerned! Getting into university is only a matter of studying hard!”

“I see... That’s reassuring. It’s a shame that you didn’t choose Sena, though.”

“Pfft!”

Shock hit Sena and I like a freight train as we spurt out our drinks in unison. There he went and casually challenged the elephant in the room.

“Wait, Pa-Papa! It’s not alright to talk about that right now!”

“No. I will address it now. I don’t know what kind of girl your girlfriend is like, but... Were there any unsatisfactory points about my Sena?” he said in a gentle tone. Though his eyes implied otherwise.

“N-No... Uhm...” Cornered by Pegasus-san, I turned to the only other person who could hand me a lifeline.

“Zaki. You should stop uncouth acts like butting into the kids’ love affairs.”

“B-But! How should I feel that despite having a fiancé, he stuck with another woman without much thought! I deserve to know about the situation!”

“? Fiance? What’s that? Father asked, tilting his head. If this was an

anime there would have been question marks appearing on his head.

“Wha-What’s that you say...? Hayato you bastard, don’t tell me you forgot that Kodaka and Sena are engaged?!”

“Eh?! Is that so?”

Father was completely in the dark, so I summarised the situation to him. “It was a promise between the both of you when we were children,” I said.

Father did nothing but groan for a while, eventually smacking his hands together as he finally remembered. “Ahh! Come to think of it, there was such a promise! Something like ‘When they grow up let’s get them married!’ But isn’t that kind of thing a joke?”

Pegasus-san’s face became stiff. “Some-Something like that... Was a joke...?”

“Anyway, during times like these, engagement is impossible without the agreement of the people involved.”

“Th-That is true.. But... But still... Ugu... Ugugugugugugu...”

Pegasus-san continued groaning with his face all red.

“Nuoooooooooooooooooooooooooon!” he shot up from his seat as he cried, before running away from the dining hall with teary eyes.

“Wai, Papa!”

“Oi, Zaki!”

Stella-san called out to my panicked father. “Please go after him, Hayato-sama. Please take care of that troublesome old man.”

“No choice huh...” While scratching his head, Father got up from the seat and left the dining hall. “Oi, wait up Pega-Zaki-kun,” he called in a monotonous voice.

Did me getting a girlfriend cause their friendship to crack ever so slightly? Just what is happening?

Just then, our eyes met. “Papa is an awkward person huh? Seems like

engagements ended a long time ago,” Sena tried to break the silence.

“Ye-Yeah, I guess.” I still felt awkward being around Sena.

“...I said it before, didn’t I? Even without an engagement, I would use my own power to get a hold of whatever I want/ I haven’t given up on anything yet.” Sena flashed a menacing smile, akin to a predator that has its helpless prey square in its sights. Kobato cowered in fear, clinging onto my arm.

After about an hour, the 2 of them returned, hopefully with the entire misunderstanding cleared.

Pegasus-san had to go around to give his customary New Year’s greetings in the afternoon, so we took the opportunity to take our leave. We still had to do our first shrine visit anyway.

But just before I got into the car, Stella-san approached me. “Kodaka-sama, how do you feel about getting a girlfriend?” Stella-san whispered.

“I still haven’t experienced anything yet,” I answered honestly. Afterall, I haven’t met Yukimura since Christmas Eve...

“Ah.”

Feeling awkward talking about this, I tried changing the topic. “Pegasus-san said that recently, Stella-san got a lover.”

For a moment, Stella-san’s face twitched and flashed red. “...That horse ² is a loose-lipped person. But.... For now, I am thinking of marriage.”

“Eh...”

Marriage, huh? That is a possibility when dating someone. I’m still a high school student, moreover one that recently got his first girlfriend, so these concepts still seem distant to me.

“...After marriage, I plan to return to England to help out at my mother’s company. Of course, he’s supportive of me.”

“Eh?! Then your job as a stewardess...”

“That is what I am extremely worried about. I must find successor before I can move. My job would have been handed over to you had you entered the family by becoming a son-in-law. But... The result was far from expected. What are you going to do?”

“Eh... Somehow... I’m sorry...” Deep down I felt guilty that I had betrayed the expectations Stella-san had of me.

“I was joking,” Stella-san chuckled. “But the fact about having a hard time finding a successor is true, though.”

1 – Zouni is a New Year’s dish containing soup with mochi rice cakes.

2 – Pegasus is 天馬 in Kanji, thus, Stella is referring to Pegasus here.

Chapter 4: Attending School

One week after winter break ended.

Since serving my suspension sentence, I haven't passed through the gates of Saint Chronica High School.

Of course, I'm not wearing the wig and glasses this time either.

Standing in front of class 2-5, I took deep breaths to calm myself down. Or at least try to, at least. Palms sweaty, I finally fathered enough strength and courage to open the door.

The whole class become silent in an instant. All the bustle of the morning conversations that was there seemed like an illusion at this point.

...I have to say that this was expected, though. But still, experiencing it first hand hurts.

Glancing around the class, I met eyes with Yozora, who promptly averted her gaze and laid her head on her desk. Tch, she was pretending to be asleep. But still, her motions were so fluid that it almost made me doubt if she hadn't been asleep from the start, and that meeting her eyes had only been my delusion. Man, as expected of someone without friends, Yozora mastered the godly skill of "Feign Being Asleep To Avoid Interactions With People".

Soon enough, our classmates resumed their idle chatter, this time in more hushed voices.

And so I commenced my walk of shame pass them. Honestly, I didn't know which is worse: walking with the entire class watching me or in the hushed conversations, undoubtedly about me. Man, I should have came earlier and avoided this hell.

Regardless.

I ignored the ever-familiar feeling of loneliness this kind of situation brought up, and took short breaths while I made my way.

Towards the platform.

Where I stood up straight.

And took in a deep breath.

“Go-Go-Good mornint!”

...

Those who had been averting their gaze now turned towards me cautiously, silently wondering what on earth was happening. Yozora was still sitting prostrated, though.

Undeterred, I recited the lines I so earnestly practised last night. “The fo-foolishh Hasegawa Kodaka! Although embarrassed, has re-returned! Th-this time, I will strive to change my heart for sure! I would like to work with all of you and receive the encouragement and guidance of everyone!!”

So much for all the rehearsal last night; I still ended up stammering. Guess I still had a long way before I could confidently pull off public speaking.

Regardless, my classmates fell silent, speechless.

Personally, I vowed to stop wearing glasses and wigs to put on a fake appearance, and I would bring myself to interact with others, bit by bit. Even if I am rejected, I would not lose heart, instead putting in more effort to be accepted. This was what I had decided.

Which takes me back here. It’s a far stretch to call this interacting, but at least I addressed the class. It wasn’t a complete failure. But man, I was so embarrassed that I wanted to run away, or hurry back to my seat and pull a Yozora.

“Go-Good, morning... Hasegawa Ko-Kodaka...! I...I look forward to working with all of you!” I greeted my classmates one more time, in a feeble attempt to close the entire speech.

Unsurprisingly, there was no response.

Well, what would a normal person's reaction even be? Even I didn't know what kind of reaction I was supposed to expect.

"Pfft."

But, of course, the one—perhaps only one—to break the silence was none other than Mikazuki Yozora.

"Kuku... Pfft... Kukuku.. Ah!" Yozora's body shook as she continued her prostrated posture. When she raised her face, it was filled with vigor and a broad smile, as tears were rolling down her cheek.

"Ahahahahahahah!!!!"

Yozora seemed to have lost it as she laughed uncontrollably. Our classmates couldn't have been more confused. Without paying any heed to their gazes, Yozora carried on. Once she had her fill, she rubbed her teary eyes and stared at me.

"Hmph," she let out a small snort before smiling.

"Y-You didn't have to laugh that much, right?"

"Yeah, I'm sorry. It's because the Bad Yankee's bad manner of speaking was so shameful I laughed without realising."

"I told you I'm not a Yankee..."

"Yeah, that's right huh? You're not even a Yankee, it's just that since birth, your hair colour was like that and your looks were like that. In the end you're just a good-for-nothing high school student huh?! Fuhaha!" Yozora proclaimed in a theatrical manner,, in a voice loud enough for the entire class to hear.

"Is that really so?", "Eh, really?", "Is that how it was?"

Such whispered conversations began amongst our classmates, eventually reaching my ears.

...

It didn't take a rocket scientist to put 2 and 2 together.

So, with feelings of surprise and appreciation, I looked at Yozora, ready to express my gratitude, naturally.

"Hmph," she pouted, face red.

"But, at the Christmas party...", "Yeah, I saw it too.", "His friends were struck..."

Ugh. Way to rain on my parade. I mean I know I acted violently, but it was foolish of me to think people would conveniently forget about it. But at the same time, if it were simply forgotten, I wouldn't be here on my journey of self-improvement.

"During Ch-Christmas, the...tension was rising a, a little... I am now re-reflecting on my actions!"

"To cause such an incident when his tension was raised...", "As I thought, isn't that delinquency?", "Scary..."

"Come to think of it, I heard it was called the Rape Festival or something."

...

.....

.....

What?

Is that what people are secretly referring to it now? Am I a rapist now? At this rate, I might as well forget about being accepted! Forget all the delusions of me being chummy with people!

"Th-That was because I was caught up in the moment! Also, I think that rape is definitely bad!"

"It's 'cause your mind is deplorable. In trying to appear smart, you case the worst words from your limited vocabulary, you know?"

“Th-That’s right!” I nodded in agreement with Yozora.

If I was already digging my own grave, it wouldn’t be that worse if I let Yozora lead.

Probably.

Hopefully.

Yozora continued, this time in a murmur, but loud enough to be heard in the dead silent classroom. “...In the first place, a good-for-nothing virgin is incapable of rape.”

“...Virgin?”, “...Seriously?”, “So Hasegawa was a virgin...”

This time, they sounded genuinely surprised, almost sympathetic even.

“Th-That’s right! I am a virgin! I was trying to act cool for a bit but my true nature is a honest and good-for-nothing high school student! I-I hope we can get along! Ossu!!”

With my morning speech over, I hurried back to my seat, all the while being abthed in gazes of suspicion and bewilderment.

Even if the label of a Yankee did not disappear; even if the perspectives of my classmates did not change; I did my best to avoid being completely rejected by them. For now. Next is to do my best to actually be accepted.

Once again, or rather, as expected, Yozora had used her godly skill and was (looking like she was) sound asleep.

Deep down, I felt enormous gratitude towards that kind side of Yozora. Thanks to her, the new and improved Hasegawa Kodaka could make his high school debut, part 2.

If this were a game, I’d probably get a C for operation[Enter The Classroom].

Now it was time for [Lunch Time].

“Good luck on completing your mission, Kodaka-senpai,” greeted Yukimura, who was of course in a female uniform, completely unaffected by the commotion my classmates were making.

Christmas was the last time I saw her—in other words, this was our first meeting since becoming a couple. And I couldn’t help but blush.

“Uh... It’s, uh, been a long time hasn’t it, Yukimura?”

“Yes, I have been looking forward to this meeting,” Yukimura blushed slightly. This should be a new experience for her too, now that I think about it.

But.

Damn! She was so cute! Blushing Yukimura should be illegal! I’m not dreaming, right?!

“...We are going out, right?” I blurted out my thoughts subconsciously.

“Yes. I am Kodaka-senpai’s lover.”

Then she smiled cutely.

At this point, the surrounding classmates erupted.

Amongst the confusion and chatter, I heard the faint sound of someone gritting their teeth and making some incomprehensible noises. Glancing over, I saw Yozora rushing out of the class, convenience store bag in hand.

“Kodaka-senpai,” Yukimura called out to me as I could only chase Yozora’s fleeting back with my eyes. Snapping me back to reality, she asked, “Shall we have lunch together?”

But all this while I had eaten lunch with Shiguma Rika. And out of habit, I made and brought her share of the bentou.

But.

Now I have Yukimura.

It's a given that couples should spend breaks together, right?

But.

Between my girlfriend and my best friend?

Now that's something the me of yesteryear never had to face.
Something normies would be familiar with.

But also, something I would have to face and not run away from.

Even if Yukimura let me spend lunch with my friends, it would be too cruel to turn her down, given how long we haven't seen each other.

There's also the relationship between Yukimura and Rika.

From what I heard, they don't get along. Unlike Yozora and Sena who have different personalities yet (seem to) get along, they are incompatible despite being more alike.

"F-For now, let's head over to the Science Room [1](#) ?"

I led the way towards the Science Room, bentou for 2 in hand.

Come to think of it, the last time I met with Rika was also during Christmas.

If I'm being honest, I secretly harboured romantic feelings towards Rika.

But I wasn't about to confess. Not now. Not to Yukimura. Nor Rika. For now at least, all I could do was seal them in a corner of my heart. Hopefully one day, when these feelings no longer linger—"Come to think of it, I used to like you that time,"—I'll tell her while laughing it off.

Who knows if that kind of frivolous talk will ever come to fruition, though? All I know is that to prevent further complications, I'll have to silence my heart.

For the sake of Rika, who accepted me as her friend.

For the sake of Yukimura, who accepted me as her lover.

For the sake of Yozora and Sena, whose feelings I had wounded.

But most importantly, for the sake of my growth, I'll have to face whatever challenges life may throw at me whether I want to or not. This is something I had to address. And this was the way I decided to.

After entering the Science Room, we made our way to the Science Preparation Room. Gathering my thoughts, I took a deep breath before I knocked. Out came a smiling Rika to welcome us.

"Hey," she greeted with a tone of familiarity.

Doki doki.

Man, that was close. All my mental preparation was almost defeated by the mere sight of a cute, cheerful Rika.

"Y-Yo," I tried my best to reply in a similar manner.

Yukimura, on the other hand, simply lowered her head in response.

Whether Rika interpreted it as a form of passive aggression, she didn't take it lying down. She too bowed, this time with a forced smile ².

"U0Uhm... Long time no see huh, Rika?" I tried to defuse the tension. "I was thinking of eating lunch together like we used to. W-Would that be alright?"

"Of course... Well only if the girlfriend doesn't have any problems with it, that is."

Yukimura took Rika's gaze head on. "... I don't have a problem with that, because friends are precious. Even if Kodaka-senpai decides to spend his time with his friends rather than me, I will put up with it," she proclaimed the extent of her feelings, flashing a lonely smile at the end.

Honestly, I was moved.

That was manly.

And she was a girl!

But.

I couldn't afford to lose here!

"Al-Alright then. Let's have lunch together—the three of us!"

This should be okay, right?

"Ah?"

"Huh?"

Answered the 2 of them in unison, grimacing.

"...Well~, Rika doesn't especially mind. I can put up with spending like break with that person."

As for that person ,

"It's fine though. There is no need to go out of your way to be tolerant. Let me forgive the fact that both of you are spending lunch break together."

Rika's eyebrows twitched in irritation. "Huh? Forgive? Who do you think you are?"

"I am Kodaka-senpai's cute girlfriend-sama, though?"

"Girlfriend? Ah, so you were a girl. I didn't realise because your chest was so flat."

".....Tsk!Bitch—"

"Guh... Y-You....."

Veins popping, they trash talked each other.

Personally, I didn't care about chest sizes, and I did find Rika very cute too. But if I said that, I'd be committing suicide, pretty much.

What I had to say, though, was something that could calm them down.

“A-Anyway,, let’s eat our meal now! Lunch break’s about to end!” I strong-armed us back on track.

While I planned for a cheerful, boisterous lunch break where we would have pointless conversations, and even do the legendary bentou exchange, reality couldn’t have been any further.

The girl’s weren’t arguing anymore, but the air was filled with so much tension I couldn’t bring myself to even taste the food. All of the food went straight to my stomach.

“From tomorrow...let’s switch on alternate days...to have lunch...”

They agreed to meet halfway, and with that, for now at least, I could spend time with both my girlfriend and best friend.

Moving on, I had to find a way for them to get along.

1 – Kanji used here is 理科 (Science & doubles as Rika’s name) and 室 (Room), thus, another interpretation could also be Rika’s Room

2 – Translation here should actually be “clung onto her smile” but it seemed weird so I went with a forced smile, which sounds nicer.

Chapter 5: Valentine

The first week of February

Currently, sitting around the clubroom were Yozora, Sena, Rika, Kobato, Maria and mein other words, all the members were present.

The one to break the silence was Yozora.

Come to think about it, it looks like there's a Valentine's event or something next week," she announced, matter-of-factly.

"That's right..."

Having never experienced Valentine's, it did slip my mind. Though now that I had a girlfriend I did wonder if Yukimura would give me any chocolates. I imagined her saying something along the lines of "For the samurai, it is outrageous to be led astray by these kinds of events." I would be lying if I said I wasn't expecting some, if I'm honest. It'd be the first time I'd receive chocolates, from friends and family included.

"Handing out chocolates during Valentine's is just an event set up by the Confectionary Society as a trick—and to fall for such a trick is just lame. Although... recently there is something called "Tomo Choco," Yozora explained. "In Japan, the norm is for girls to give chocolates to the guys they like. Nowadays, girls are also giving chocolates to friends too, and that's called Tomo Choco."

"Hooh? Why?" Sena asked

"Who knows. Maybe a plan by the enterprise to, in some way, cash in on the Valentine's market by luring people without any love interests. Or maybe it was a boom without a known origin. Regardless, Tomo Choco are trending, and we cannot let this opportunity pass as friends as well as members of the Neighbour's Club."

Summarising Yozora's roundabout speech, what she meant to say was: "For Valentine's, we can't help it but to practice making and giving out Tomo Choco. Ah, it's so lame."

"I don't get it, but I get to eat chocolates? Yay!" Maria rejoiced innocently.

Making... chocolates...? These people are...?

We're all gathered in the Hasegawa household kitchen on a Sunday for some actual extra curricular activities. The kitchen, being spacious and armed with all the cooking utensils I'm used to handling, made my job at supporting them that much easier.

Being their first time here, Sena and Rika were understandably nervous, while Yozora calmly petted Kobato. Maria, on the other end of the scale, ran around shouting "Yay, this is Onii-chan's house!" like a kid.

"Well, what we're going to be making today is truffle chocolate. It's easy to make, especially for first-timers—and pretty good too.

It was all up to me to lead them today. Since I had no experience making chocolates, I did some practice specially for today. Though, once I started making them, I realised they were more complex and deeper than expected. It heightened my interest in confectionary making.

I prepared all of the ingredients and tools, even chopping the store-purchased chocolate into fine pieces for Yozora who could not handle kitchen knives. Next, we had to first melt the chopped chocolate, form the desired shape, cool it before finally sprinkling some cocoa powder on top.

That should be doable for the girls of the Neighbour's Club, who have no experience in the kitchen, right?

"Only use the provided ingredients to make your chocolates. Do not mix any unnecessary ingredients. Is that clear?"

To which, Sena and Rika expressed their displeasure.

“Eh? Won’t that be boring since it’s too normal? The great me is going to make a more unique chocolate,” proclaimed Sena.

“That’s right. Just when I’m about to make Rika’s Deluxe Secret Hidden Flavour.”

“Absoooooooooooooooooolutely not!”

With great reluctance, they both agreed, seemingly at least.

And so, we began making truffle chocolates. Yozora, who had good dexterity, faced no issues in preparing the shape of the chocolate. Sena and Rika were also able to catch on pretty quickly, too.

Meanwhile, a different story could be said about Maria and Kobato. Somewhere along the way, they got distracted and began playing around.

“Kukuku... Have a look, Magic Crystal, Dark Matter.....!” Kobato said with her hands all sticky.

“Oh, it’s sweet!” proclaimed Maria after having a bite of Kobato’s fingers.

“Uwah! Don’t lick my finger, idiottt!”

“Ahaha, melted chocolate really looks like poop huh~ It’s alright for you to eat my poop too!”

“...Kukuku.... It’s sweet....”

Just then, a voice abruptly came from the second floor, interrupting our shenanigans. “Oh, you guys are at it huh? Somehow, these two have always been in everyone’s care. I’m Hasegawa’s father.”

“Ko-Kodaka’s d-dad!?”

“Fa-Father!?”

Shocked by the sudden appearance of father, along with his frank greetings, Yozora and Rika both crushed their chocolates with a splattering sound.

“...I told you not to come down right.”

“I know, I know. I’ll go back now.” But, just as he brushed by me, “So which is your girlfriend, Yukimura? Don’t tell me the short golden haired girl’s the answer...” he whispered as his gaze shifted from Yozora to Rika to Maria.

“...If it’s Yukimura, she’s not here today.”

I introduced Yukimura as “the person who was in the same club”, so it wasn’t wrong to assume that she would have been among those present.

“I see, that’s a shame... That being said, be it Sena-chan or that girl, all of them seem to be of a high level huh? What’s happening in your high school life?”

That made me wonder, what am I really doing with my high school life?

After the truffle chocolates were finished—with no problems thankfully—we wrapped it. We brought our own shares to the clubroom on Valentine’s for a group snack fest and as expected, it tasted delicious.

Much to my delight, during lunch break Yukimura gave me a store-bought chocolate shaped after a famous Sengoku family crest. While our handmade chocolate couldn’t compare in terms of taste, it only strengthened my resolve to dedicate my free time to confectionary making.

The end of the day marked the end of club activities, and with that, the end of Valentine’s. Ending this way without any troubles was fine by me, but from a RomCom’s perspective, this was probably the worst way to end it.

Chapter 6: Graduation Ceremony

March.

Saint Chronica's High School's gymnasium has been outfitted for the graduation ceremony of its students.

"W-We, the current students have inherited many things passed on by our seniors; and we too will, from now onwards, do our best to not disgrace the name of Saint Chronica □" a nervous Aoi Yusa read the farewell address as the representative of the student body. Ah, the duties of the Student Council President.

It went without saying that she didn't exude the same air of confidence as her predecessor, Hinata Hidaka, but many people were taken to her restless, hardworking figure. That made her still well received as president.

The executive committee of the Student Council are as follows: Aoi Yusa, who was previously the treasurer; Karin Jinguuji, formerly the secretary and now the vice-president; and finally Yukimura Kusunoki, who took over the role of treasurer.

Normally, in the event of a vacant seat, the president would seek nominations from other committee members. In this case, it was very natural for Yukimura to be nominated since she was on good terms with Aoi for a long time. Not to mention she had helped out the student council earlier too.

While the remaining secretary and general affair seats were still vacant, the rest of the executive committee set on looking for a replacement from the new batch of students next year. It seemed like they were able to hang on with such few members since Yozora was such a godsend. Not only was she keeping their energy and morale levels high, she was also an efficient worker . Meanwhile, I could

only help out with odd jobs. Since the both of us had helped the student council out a fair bit last year, Aoi offered us the vacant seats. I appreciated her kindness, but I wasn't willing to compromise her position as president. She'd draw a fair bit of animosity from the student body if she were to elect a troublemaker who had caused a massive incident. Until the time I'm accepted by them, I'll decline being part of the representing body. Meanwhile Yozora wasn't keen on being the public face of the student council. That didn't mean we'd stop associating with them, though.

With that said, it seemed like the student council committee would continue functioning well. They always have the support of the student body, who are look up to and are ever-ready to lend a helping hand. Or hands, in this case.

"We sincerely thank you, for honouring us with such warm words. Today□" Yusa concluded her farewell speech. The former vice-president, as well as the representative of the graduating students, Akane Ootomo-san took over and read the formal reply.

While the content was nothing extraordinary, and listening to it got boring after a while, Akane-san still managed to pull a number on the student body. During her stint at Saint Chronica, she garnered the support of majority of the female student body. Clearly, there were students proud to have had her as their peer, as they

Her popularity amongst the female student body at least were outstanding and a few avid supporters were sniffing and sobbing.

The content was normal, rather listening to it was a little boring and above all, it was written in a stiff writing style; However, Akane-san's popularity amongst the current female student body was outstanding and she was a peer to be proud of having, (as such, it was no wonder) sniffing sounds could be heard from amongst the female students present here.

Sniff. "Uu...." a particularly close muffled cry reached my ears.

Thinking to myself "No way..." I glanced over towards my left, to the row of girls of 2-5□in other words, my classmates. And there she was, Mikazuki Yozora, suppressing her cries while wiping her eyes with a

handkerchief.

“...!!” face immediately turning scarlet when our eyes met, she averted her gaze downwards.

After all, it was none other than Akane-san who had sought Yozora's assistance in dealing with her sister, and throughout their interactions Yozora did seem like she idolised Akane-san. Of course she'd be more than a little bit saddened when her idol leaves. Yozora must have let her guard down, for her to display such emotions—not that it was abnormal. It did make me happy in some ways, and jealous in other ways.

Thus marked the official end of the graduation ceremony. The graduating students were allowed to receive flowers from, mingle and take pictures with their underclassmen. Some cheeky underclassmen even took the opportunity to confess. Essentially, it marked the last normie event of the school year.

The student council were left to clean the gymnasium thereafter, and I obliged. Not that clean up could have begun since there were only 2 other people present. Or rather, it was because it was those 2 people.

Yozora Mikazuki and Hinata Hidaka.

“This idiot! Moron! Scum! Trash! Dreg! Shit head!” gone was the teary-eyed and sentimental Yozora, and in its place was the usual tsun, sharp mouthed Yozora, this time hurling insults at her older sister.

“Y-You don't have to say it to that extent...” Hinata-san could only muster a dejected-sounding response.

It turns out that Hinata Hidaka-senpai was going to be retained. Hinata-san may not have bothered putting in that much effort towards studying, but for Yozora, who gave her all tutoring her sister on the pretense that she may graduate if she had scraped a decent grade, it was understandable that she bore resentment. Hinata-san bummed the final end-of-semester test, only to bear the wrath of her younger sister. Word on the street was that the academy wanted to avoid having the student council president retain a year, but allowing

her to graduate with her grades would only serve to hinder her future academic prospects.

Didn't mean it was easy on her, either. Hinata-san was sighing most of the time during the graduation ceremony, as she sat in an isolated corner seat together with the current student body. Clearly, she wanted to run away as far as possible. I could only sympathise with her predicament. I had my fair share of being isolated, but not to the point where I had to watch on from afar as my peers graduated, leaving myself alone.

Kids, this is why you shouldn't neglect your studies.

"Human shaped unicellular organism! Moving snot! Anthropoid wearing a school uniform! Concentrated sponge head!" since finding out her retainment, Yozora didn't stop her barrage of insults when they met face-to-face.

"Haaaaaaaaaah~~~~~" Hinata-san sighed yet again, even as she was about to tear up.

" I hate being peers with my older sister!!

~~~~~ "

This time, the elder sister laughed cheerfully at the younger's outright rejection of her. "Hahaha. Well, don't be like this little sister. You can't really find an opportunity to be like this you know?"

"That carefree attitude of yours is annoying. I'll strangle you to death, chicken head! Gosh, why are you so stupid?! Oh yeah, how about dropping out halfway? Since you already decided to find a job at Delicious Paradise (Mei Uei Tein Tan) <sup>1</sup> ? Academic backgrounds don't matter in the F&B industry, right?"

"No, it's disappointing but the owner said, 'Our cuisines are not for idiots.' If I don't graduate properly, he won't hand the reins over to his apprentice."

"Kuh...." Yozora seized her temple and took a deep breath.

Soon, she put on a determined face. "Fine... You now understand that even with stopgap learning, your level of stupidity cannot be

changed. Hence, let's treat this as a harvest... After all, I have decided to live by looking forwards..."

"Yes, humans should live by looking forward!"

"You should reflect a little! ...Listen well maggot. For one year, I will strictly beat the elementary school materials into you. If you don't reach the desired academic performance within the time limit, you will swallow a nail. It would be good if you get to point where you could factorise the number of nails remaining, though."

"Hahaha, stop with the scary jokes little sister...." Hinata-san could only break out in cold sweat in response to Yozora's deadpan yet serious expression.

"I don't have an interest in joking with a talking dirt particle from the pores of a skin."

"Haha, hahaha..."

"By the way, if the nails run out, the next punishment will be tearing your n\*pples using pliers."

"Hii!"

"...Come to think of it, using pliers to make you swallow nails and twist your n\*pples, what are your thoughts?"

"Ohh, my little sister has consulted me! I'm happy! But she's so scary!"

...If an outsider had listened to that exchange, they would say that those 2 are own relatively good terms with each other, probably.

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1 – In the raws it is written as 美味天堂 with the author suggesting it reads Mei Wei Tein Ton. In Chinese, the words are read as Mei Wei Tian Tang. As seen here much of the reading goes in line with the Chinese reading. Then, the reading of 堂 (Tang → imagine saying tongue) differs too greatly from Ton, which was what the author suggests. So, in order to better replicate how it'll sound like in Japanese by following the Chinese reading, I changed it as Tan.





# Chapter 7: Promotion (Moving up a grade)

The end of the autumn break marked the start of the new school year.

And unsurprisingly, students were gathered around the entranceway, checking their new classes posted at the bulletin board. Not that it meant anything special to me, since I had continually changed school since young. I was numb to trivial thoughts such as “Will be be in the same class as that person?” and “I wonder what class that person is assigned to?”

Until last night, that is.

I think I was able to understand the feelings of normies just a little bit more. Anxiety got the better of me, as I silently prayed I would be with the few people I knew at least. Then the what if's came in and my mind went into overdrive, coming up with worst case scenarios and all sorts of contingency plans. Would I be with my friends? Would I still be able to see my lover? Would my class be assigned to a certain well-known teacher? What if I'm surrounded by strangers? What if my homeroom teacher's someone unlikeable?

What if I'm not able to see everyone?

Not that I was complaining; it was refreshing, frankly. I truly did welcome all these new emotions and experiences.

So, with my heart thumping loudly in my chest, I made my way around the pockets of students. They could probably hear my heartbeat if they tried.

Sa...ta...na...Ha...Hashimoto. Hase...there it is. Right smack in the middle of the 3<sup>rd</sup> year 2<sup>nd</sup> class' roster was my name. The homeroom teacher was the same as before, Mr Asada. I did a second

sweep of the class roster, this time looking for any familiar names.

Yozora Mikazuki? No.

Sena Kashizawaki? No.

Karin Jinguuji? No.

Hinata Hidaka? No.

Aoi Yusa? Yes.

Whew, that was a relief.

Aside from Yusa, there were a couple of Year 2 classmates in the same class as me, but she was the only one I had any interactions with. There were rumours that results, attitude and relationships were considered when forming the classes; which meant that it was only natural that the student council president was placed with a troublemaker like me.

Talking about the rest of the gang, Yozora was in 1st class, Sena in 4th and Karin and Hinata were in 5th class. Despite going through great pains to become friends, with this separation it would mean that they would continue having problems with pair-forming exercises in English and Physical Education lessons.

New classmates means new first encounters.

For the new classmates who didn't actually realise they were in the same class as me, they were about to get another reminder.

"Uugh, he is...?!", "Eh? He couldn't possibly be in the same class right...?", "M-My youth is over...."

"Ah! Kodaka-kun! We're in the same class from today onwards huh?!"

That was close. "Y-Yeah. I'll be in your care," I greeted my saviour, Aoi Yusa, while holding back tears. Thanks for being my 'get out of social suicide' card, Yusa. If it weren't for her I'd probably drop out the next day. Not that most of the student body wouldn't mind it.

With the social execution of Hasegawa Kodaka narrowly avoided, the class regained its hustle and bustle.

Yusa didn't seem fazed by all of that. Or maybe that's how she wanted it to be. "I am overjoyed to be in the same class with you! Let's work together from now on!" she bowed and returned to her seat. Then she continued chatting with her friends as if nothing had happened.

To her, at least.

"H-Hey, could it be that Yusa Yusa's on good terms with that person?" The only ones who knew about my relationship with the student council are its members; it's no surprise that the student body by and large would think that I'm friendly with them.

"Yesh! Kodaka-kun is a very wonderful person! Ah, could Mia-san possibly be interested in Kodaka-kun? It's a shame but Kodaka-kun already has a very cute girlfriend!" H-Hey, you didn't have to say it that way... Even the girls are too shocked to respond.

I hid my blushing face and hurriedly proceeded to my assigned seat written on the blackboard. Seems like wherever I went I'll still attract attention, but thanks to Yusa, the voices of dissent seem to have died down a little. I wasn't expecting people to forget I was a troublemaker, but my gut feeling was that we would become more intimate in the coming academic year.



# Chapter 8: Club Member Recruitment

Our classes may have changed but our daily club activities weren't any different. We still used the clubroom as a place to gather and do our own things. I was doing the mathematics homework that was given out, Sena was playing her game, Rika was on her laptop and Yozora was regretting drinking her instant coffee.

"Come to think of it, are we not going to recruit new members?" I broke the silence.

2 weeks have passed since the new term. Which is coincidentally the amount of time the first year students have spent trying out the various clubs on offer. It's not compulsory to join a club and people can still join later on, but most decide during the opening weeks of the academic year. It's precisely why club members bother to put on tacky costumes or act out ardent displays in hopes of bolstering their club's forces.

"Club member recruitment huh..." The club president only stared blankly in response. "...Does Kodaka want a new club member to join?"

"I'm...not sure..."

"You aren't being straightforward huh?" Yozora replied, displeased.

I put on a bitter smile and meekly apologised. The club was only formed last year by Yozora and one year later, there are no unique traditions or reasons to continue this club, frankly speaking. Compounding that, the remaining members would be Rika, Kobato and Maria. It wasn't as if they had any special feelings for the Neighbour's Club itself.

Even so.

I wouldn't deny that the club gave people like me solace. And I'd want such a place to continue existing even after our departure.

Though such a paradise may prove to be but a mirage. Whenever two or more people gather, there will always be discord. In order to preserve a comfortable space, compromises must be made. The compromises may even come in the form of the exclusion of people who are inherently incompatible. That was how the present Neighbour's Club was born: through compromises, hurting and getting hurt. It was precisely because of this I understood how important the fleeting state of tranquility actually was.

Honestly, I wanted to spend every moment with these members til the bitter end. But what would the addition of new members do? Would it break the balance? Would there be more infighting? But where would the hermits go to?

"I might want to recruit new members, but at the same time I don't want them to join."

"To Rika, there is no need to actively invite potential club members to join, but... Rika thinks that it would be good if the entrance was left open. For children just like the old Rika. It's up to them to step through, though.

"Hmm, I see..." Yozora slowly nodded in agreement. "Alright then, we will not have open invitations, but let's at least put up recruitment posters."

"By poster, you mean the deplorable friend recruitment poster made to be read diagonally?"

"D-don't call it a d-deplorable poster!" Yozora pouted. "Hmph. I will do up a new poster and change the invitation message since the old one has served its purpose." Rika and Sena both tilted their heads to Yozora, naturally. After all, only I knew what Yozora's message was, beyond just the recruitment message.

It was a private address to me—a modest appeal. Differing from the recruitment message in that it did not follow any rules, and a message that no one would understand if they didn't know the names "Taka" and "Sora".

Changing her previously lonely tone, Yozora proudly declared her intentions. "Right. Now let's get right to working on new ideas for the poster! I will design a masterpiece that far exceeds the previous poster, so look forward to it!"

"Do your best," I voiced my support, her lonely face still in my memory.

"Feast your eyes! This is the Newest New Club Member Recruitment Poster!" Yozora proudly unveiled the poster with a self-satisfied smug. It even had that previous illustration on it.

## Neighbour's Club

Progress your convictions like that of Lincoln, without losing heart to hardships like the King of Normies, while being steady like the waxing of the moon. Trust that you will reach your ideals someday. Even if you die halfway through, the days we spent together will live on for eternity.

Place of Activity: Chapen Lounge 4

Hidden vertical message: リア充は死ね -> Die normies

“Hooh...” Despite getting lost halfway in the text, I felt like it was conveying a meaningful message, probably.

“It’s ‘Die Normies’ this time huh?” Rika seemed to get the encrypted message. Yozora seemed even more smug.

“Eh...? Normie...?” Puzzled, I read the poster closely this time and true to Yozora’s poster making antiques, there was a hidden message when read vertically.

Die normies

Yozora managed to express the goal of the club while slipping in a personal grudge this time.

“Sheesh... Preparing such strange materials once again...”

“This isn’t some strange material, Kodaka. The only people who can notice this hidden message are those who hate normies and haven’t had a fulfilling youth. The Neighbour’s Club is only open to them. Everyone else can die.”

“Not sure if I’d want to get close to people who want death to normies though.” It was at this moment that I let out a bitter smile despite myself. Last year too I had this conversation with Yozora, who seemed to be realise this too as she put on a nostalgic smile.

Sena joined us last year in June after seeing the poster and eventually they became friends. Who knows, maybe this poster might create



another miracle.

“Alright. Let’s go ahead and post this around the school.” This marked the first club activities we had since becoming third years.

2 weeks had passed since we started putting up the recruitment poster and the period for selecting a club to join had passed. Even so, the Neighbour’s Club didn’t receive a single new applicant. Maybe there wasn’t any miracle to be found.

“What a relief... So there weren’t any normie haters amongst the new students huh?” Yozora may have sounded pleased, but her facial expression was tinged with regret.



# Chapter 9: Mother

Lunch break on a late April, a few days before Golden Week.

“Will you meet with my esteemed mother <sup>1</sup> ?” Yukimura nonchalantly shot me the question.

“Pfft! <sup>2</sup> ”

The one-two punch was super effective. My half-chewed rolled omelette lay on the floor in all it's semi-solid glory. Ugh, I'm sorry for wasting my food, honestly.

“By meeting with your m-mother, you mean? Eh? Ehhh!? W-why!?”

I mean, it has been 5 months since Christmas Eve, and our relationship <sup>3</sup> has progressed well. Despite being in different years, we still find common time to pander to each other. We're together during lunch break, we're together helping out with the Student Council, and we're together on our off days. Shopping, going to the library, watching movies, karaoke, bowling, arcade, table tennis even—all the standard date activities for high schoolers, we did them. Not forgetting the romantic gestures, obviously.

And I enjoyed being a couple thoroughly. The normally apathetic Yukimura in date-mode would open up and turn into this ball of joyiness. It was easy to have fun around her.

She'd tell me about her favourite Sengoku Era <sup>4</sup> work we'd read it together. Then I would recommend something from Annals of the Three Kingdoms <sup>5</sup> , making sure to give Military Commander goods as presents too.

You could call it being a sore loser, or being determined, since both are 2 sides of the same coin, but I hated losing. Especially to a girl. Yukimura would play along with me until I gave up, not acknowledging the victory and certainly not rubbing it in. What a

thoughtful girlfriend. That said, Yukimura was a beast at digital games. I wouldn't call myself a slouch, but against her that didn't make a difference. So I had contented myself with simply observing her skilled playthrough of whatever arcade machine she put her hands on.

5 months on and honest to goodness, Yukimura is a helluva lot cuter. And to think I'd be blessed with a girlfriend this cute, honest and lovable during my high school life? High school freshman me would have dismissed it as a lie even if he heard it from senior me. You must have mistaken me for a Kodaka Hasegawa from another parallel universe I would have told him.

And it's only getting better. I felt ready to move on to the next phase, but was now the time? How much time do couples need before they got more intimate? Was it now? I didn't know. But I was prepared to make the jump. Or rather, Stella-san made sure I always had something with me for such advances.

Oh crap, I was too distracted being excited that Yukimura's words almost slipped me. Would you like to meet my mother, implying, would you like to meet the parents of your girlfriend. The first of future meetings, possibly, and one that would culminate in other words, "M-Marriage?!"

"Excuse me?"

"It's, it's nothing <sup>6</sup>. Just, let me hear the full details for now."

Yukimura nodded and started explaining indifferently. Does she really think nothing of this request?

"When I informed my mother that I had started going out with Kodaka-senpai, she strongly requested to meet you. It was a free-for-all last year since last year so things were hectic, but now that everything has calmed down I wanted to take this opportunity to invite Kodaka-senpai over during the Golden Week. It has been my mother's long-standing wish and one that I want to grant, so would you be fine with that?"

"Y-Yeah, s-sure. A-Alright, there's no problem."

Looks like she just wants to meet the kind of guy her daughter is dating and give her seal of approval. Probably, hopefully, it's just a simple case of parental concern.

Not that that made me any less nervous. That being said, a small part of me was excited to see what kind of environment Yukimura grew up in. She did mention her mother was a chariman at a gaming company, which explained her "oujo-sama" vibes. She wasn't flaunting her status, but there were hints of her background. She was always using the latest flagship phone, good at whatever games she played and was frankly thriftless. Then, it shouldn't have come to a surprise Yukimura was the daughter of that kind of woman, but it still did, nonetheless.

"Eh? A Kusunoki who's the head of a gaming company? Don't tell me, it's President Himeko Kusunoki of Peerless Games!<sup>7</sup>? The one that released Warring Kingdoms RANSE!?" Riko shot out of nowhere. Jeez, calm down. I almost let out another rolled omelette.

Rika brushed me to the side, paying no mind to her sudden outburst.

"Ah, come to think of it, she did mention something about making a game that sounded like that." Yukimura continued, unaffected.

"Seriously..."

"Is she quite a famous person by chance?"

"Of course <sup>8</sup>!"

Seriously, Yukimura? You had no idea how renowned your mother was? Also, Rika you need to tone it down. It's not feminine to fangirl until your spit is flying.

"There isn't a single person in the fujoshi community that hasn't heard of Sengoku Rance! Then, when talking about the mastermind <sup>9</sup> behind it, President Himeko Kusunoki, has been nicknamed Princess Himeko, the God Creator ! God incarnate herself! She prides herself on not only being famous amongst fujoshis but even male gamers as well! Her popularity is idol-like and has earned the nickname, Charisma Creator ! She has been ranked first for 5

consecutive years in a certain game magazine's poll for Favourite Female Creator ! And she's Rika's 5 Most Respected People!"

I could only reel before Rika's overwhelming fangirling. "...By the way, who's the other 4?"

"Nikola Tesla, von Braun, Gennai Hiraka and Nobel"

"She's on the same level as those people!? ...Wait, come to think of it, Edison isn't included huh? Even though he's the king of inventions."

"That's because he's a normie asshole who's successful. I approve of his greatness but don't respect him." Rika spat after mentioning his name, before sounding depressed. "Although I knew that Peerless Games's headquarters was in this prefecture, I can't believe that Yukimura-kun is the daughter of the president... This is Rika Shuguma's failure of a lifetime!"

I never knew she was this much of a big shot in the industry.

"...If possible, could Hime Kusunoki sign Rika's Warring Kingdoms RANSE 3 Legends of the Courageous Generals ?"

"You could've asked Yukimura for an opportunity to meet face to face if you're that much of a fan."

"Hmph, I don't wanna," she pouted like a small kid who didn't get what she wanted. Man, that was cute.

Uneventfully, Golden Week arrived. And so did I, at my girlfriend Yukimura Kusunoki's house.

If you consider a 15-storey high mansion, equipped with concierges, security officers, CCTVs, automatic locks and countless other features a house. A house for kings, maybe. If I was out of place coming to this high end neighbourhood, I felt even more awkward being in this building. Did I really come to the right place? Heck, can I go back now?

Not that I had the chance to bail. "Please enter, Kodaka-senpai," she greeted me, seemingly sensing my discomfort.

“S-sorry for the intrusion...” I replied meekly, following her lead. Man, I must have looked so pathetic.

We walked across the fully carpeted floor and into the living room. A lone woman sat on the sofa. She seemed to be in her mid-twenties with flaxen hair and a slender figure. She gave off the vibe of a gentle, intellectual beauty. She was definitely related to Yukimura.

Clad in a crisp outfit, she was the very definition of what a capable woman was, even if it was out of place in a house setting. Did she take this as a formal meeting? Does she have other plans? Was she expecting not Yukimura’s boyfriend, but a business client instead? Did Yukimura forget to mention she had an older sister?

“Mother, I have brought Kodaka-senpai.”

Huh?

Huh???

Huh?????

I reflexively bowed and greeted her. Good save, me!

“Nice to meet you. Yukimura’s mother, Himeko Kusunoki.”

“Y-Yes! Nice to meet you too! Uhm, uh. Me, no, I-I am currently dating Yukimura-san... I am Kodaka Hasegawa! T-Thank you for graciously inviting me!” Bad follow-up, me! What was that shrill voice at the end? Gah!

Himeko-san, seemingly unfazed, or perhaps silently judging me, calmly invited me to take a seat.

“Mother, I will prepare tea,” Yukimura announced as she headed to the kitchen, leaving just the two of us alone.

“...My daughter has imposed quite a bit on you,” she broke the ice, speaking with an overpowering gaze.

“N-no, I too have imposed on her.”

Himeko-san said no more, as she stared at me in silence. I wasn't sure if she was waiting for me to speak up, or was just awkward around young'uns in general.

Racing for something, anything, to talk about, I pointed out what initially caught me off. "D-Do you wear a suit even at home?"

"...The only clothes I own to meet people in are suits, for media interview purposes," Himeko-san replied awkwardly.

"Mother's always in a jersey at home or office," Yukimura announced as she served the tea.

"Seriously..." I guess top brass think differently? I wouldn't know either.

That would make a third beauty that killed the jersey look, after Yozora and Hinata-san. Hmm, was I uncovering something about myself? I didn't really want to know, honestly.

"Formal dresses and jerseys are the only clothes we need."

Deep down I felt my heart string being tugged by that sulking face and innocent defence. Ugh. She was already youthful and by acting even younger, I didn't know if my heart could take any more damage. This despite her actual age being older than my father and Pegasus-san.

"...Hasegawa-kun," she attempted to shift the conversation, this time almost glaring. From bashful to cold, huh? "Would it be alright for me to enquire?"

"Y-Yesh! What is it?"

"...That hair. When did you dye it?"

Ah, of course. She finally addressed the elephant in the room. I mean, I wasn't expecting her to skim over it so I was prepared to explain that it's not artificial colouring, and even talked a bit about my background while I was at it.

She took some time to ingest my words, as if it was something



weighing heavily on her.

“...So that’s why... I’m sorry I said something very rude... Truth be told, in the past, there were unpleasant males who looked like this, and I was just erring on the side of caution. Really, I’m sorry I judged you unfairly.” She even bowed her head to show her sincerity.

“N-No, don’t mind it! I’m used to people judging me anyway! As long as you understand, it’s all fine!” Somehow, even though she was the one apologising, I ended up feeling bad instead.

Thankfully, Yukimura joined and the conversation shifted to more ‘youthful’ topics, such as school and our dating life. She just wanted to hear about her daughter’s life, really. Romantic life, specifically.

“Well, now I understand that Hasegawa-kun is serious about this relationship. But I, as a mother, am still worried about my daughter...”

“What would it be about, mother?”

“Well... As the both of you are still young... I’m afraid if I leave the two of you alone...”

“Are you concerned if we’ll be having sex?”

Woah! Hang on there Yukimura! Wait, Himeko-san! Don’t blush now! It’ll just make everything awkward! Ahhhh!

“T-That’s correct,” Himeko-san nodded in agreement, after regaining her composure. “...It’s not that I’m opposed to you dating H-Hasegawa-kun... But I feel that more time should be taken to better understand each other. If it’s not a trusting relationship, then...”

Uwah, this is so embarrassing! But I can’t avert my attention! At the very least, it was apparent Himeko-san cared ever so much for her daughter. There was no faulting her for that.

But then.

The daughter Yukimura <sup>10</sup> went for the kill with a fast ball. Right as her mother was reeling in from the first shot.

“If so, would it be alright for me to have sex with Kodaka-senpai?”

Swift and decisive.

There was no need for small play.

And it payed off.

“W-When!? Umm...” Himeko-san was giving in to her daughter. “...At least a year’s time. You should decide after having a year of platonic dating. Agreed?”

“I understand. I will hold off until then.”

Did I hear that right? Hold off? It’s been weighing on her mind, and she’s been considering it all this while? Oh man.

In the face of such resolute determination from Yukimura and kindness from Himeko-san, I agreed. Not that I had much of a choice.

After all was said and done, Himeko-san let us have a pre-release run of Sengoku RANSE . The generals were all designed as handsome men and had a good character cast. I could see why Rika was eagerly anticipating it. Take Date Masamune, the protagonist’s retainer. His physical build and characteristics resemble an attractive blonde man and has a unique character design. An expert of the Solitary Gun Style , he’s proficient with both guns and swords. To top it off, he’s able to awaken the power of a dragon sealed in his eyepatch.

Surprisingly, the inspiration for his character came from a particular someone Himeko-san met 20 years ago, when she was still a university student. She met a blonde beauty who wore an eyepatch and had exaggerated mannerisms. Her impression lasted all this while, huh.

Speaking of which, there was someone like Kobato 20 years ago? I’m wondering if there’s some mysterious powers at play.

I wouldn’t have known at that time, but turns out, there were. Soon, I would learn what kind of person the so called Blonde <sup>11</sup> Eye Patch Girl was.

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1 – phrase used here is 母上 (haha-ue) which is how Samurais addressed their mother.

2 – The sound people make when they almost spit out the food they're eating.

3 – The writer seems to want to distinguish between Dating & Relationship (but seriously he used it interchangeably...I don't even know anymore...):

Dating (付き合い)

Relationship (交際) \*\*though this word has multiple meanings (acquaintance, company, society, friendship & association)\*\*; the reason I opted for relationship and not the rest is as follows:

Firstly, acquaintance & friendship is out as they're friends already; company doesn't fit as they've been hanging out with each other in the Neighbour's Club; society is plain weird in this context, which leaves me with association which is also weird so I used relationship instead.

4 – The basics is that the Emperor of Japan (ruler) lost control of the Daimyos (feudal lords) as during those times, these lords could keep armies to defend their land. However, these armies became way too powerful for one used for self defence, and these lords vying for more land & power, fought each other bringing an era of chaos.

If you wish to find out more read it here -> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sengoku\\_period](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sengoku_period)

5 – Famous text covering the history during the late Eastern Han Dynasty and the Three kingdoms period, it is split into 3 books (Wei, Shu, Wu) containing biographies from one/more persons.

Wei, Shu and Wu are the 3 remaining powerhouses after the alliances/conquests amongst the feuding provinces.

This period should not be confused with Warring States Period: the period of chaos between 475BC and 221 BC which ended when Qin unified China forming the Qin Dynasty, first Dynasty of China.

To find out more -> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Records\\_of\\_the\\_Three\\_Kingdoms](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Records_of_the_Three_Kingdoms)

6– Word used here is いや (iya), meaning no in Japanese but since Japanese is pretty context based & that saying no in this context is weird in English, I went with nothing.

7 – For those who are interested, the Kanji is 天下一ゲームズ (ten-ka-ichi-gemuzu) and its meaning is best on Earth/Peerless for simplicity. 天 (Heaven) 下 (Below) 一 (One), from these root words, it can be gathered that the word means First (place), below the Heavens (meaning Earth) ゲームズ being games written in Katakana.

8 – The raw (有名もなにも) convey a slightly different meaning which is tough to translate to English. Basically it's roughly the meaning of of course when you're talking about famous it's her.

9 – The first creator refers to a person who makes products such as drawings, games, music, etc. The second, refers to the person who created the world - God.

10 – Written as Yukimura, read as むすめ (Musume) meaning daughter.

11 – Written as PatsuKin, Kinpatsu read backwards.



# Chapter 10: Sister Maria becomes a flag

One day after classes, I met Kate in the school grounds. She said: 'I'm going to go fishing with Pegasus on Sunday. Do you want to come along, Onii-san?'

In October last year, Kate seemed like she said something to me that seemed like a confession but also not like a confession, but even so, we still maintain a relationship where we can talk casually with each other.

'Fishing, huh.... I don't have a fishing rod, nor any other fishing gear.'

'Don't worry about it. Pegasus has a lot, you can borrow them from him.'

'Is that so? Then I'll go.'

I answered without thinking too much about it. Kate said 'Nice~' with a shy smile, and then, asked me in a teasing tone:

'But is this really fine? Don't you have a date with your girlfriend on Sunday?'

'Eh? Oh, me and Yukimura decided to go on a date on Saturday, so Sunday is fine.'

'Is- is that so?'

Kate's cheeks took on a slight blush.

'Onii-san is so lovey-dovey with his girlfriend...'

'Lovey-dovey... stop kidding around...'

Saying these words were really embarrassing, so embarrassing that

my cheeks grew hot.

'Aww.... I also want to go out with a boy.'

She said while scratching her butt.

'...if only you didn't behave like an old man so much, you'd easily get a boyfriend.'

Kate smiled bitterly and narrowed her eyes at me as she spoke:

'Hmmm~ I won't be fine with just any boy though~'

'...is there a certain type you like?'

'Hmm... well, that is... for example, even if I fart in front of him, he would be tolerant enough that he'd just laugh it off... someone who would let me act spoiled... like a kind older brother... no, like a father...'

Kate's tone was very serious, but then she suddenly turned back to her usual expression.

'Ju- just kidding! Then, see you on Sunday! I'm looking forward to it!'

She smiled as she feigned ignorance, then quickly dashed off.



A few days later, in the first third of June, there came a bright and clear Sunday.

I was fishing sweetfish [\[1\]](#) by the riverside along with Kate and the others. Chikyūgawa, Tooya city's great river, was a famous sweetfish fishing spot. From the start of the fishing season in May and on, people can be seen carrying fishing rods all over.

Accompanying me were Takayama Kate, Kashiwazaki Pegasus and my father Hayato.

In his student days, it seems that my dad often went fishing with Pegasus. As soon as he learned I was going fishing, he said: 'Then I'll

come along and fish as well. It's been a long time since last.'

Pegasus wasn't wearing his usual kimono, but a wetsuit and a fishing vest, as well as a hat and sunglasses. His preparations had been extremely thorough. He looked like 'The Fisherman'. He was standing in the middle of the river, and even though it had barely been an hour, he had already caught quite a few sweetfishes.

'Hey, Zaki! Don't be so serious about this!'

'I- I'm not!'

Pegasus-san retorted to my dad, his face red.

Me, dad and Kate hadn't stepped into the river, but were fishing from the shore.

We weren't wearing as professional clothes as Pegasus either, just normal long-sleeved ones. Seeing Kate wearing something other than nun garb was very refreshing.

Given the recent clear weather, the Chikyūgawa's flow was gentle today. The river water clear as well.

I remember going fishing with dad in my childhood as being very boring, but seeing him fishing in the river gave me a sense of calm.

Spending one's time like this isn't so bad after all...

'Aw yeah! I caught one!'

'Oh, not bad, sister Kate!'

'Haha, you too, Hasegawa-san [\[2\]](#) . How many have you caught now?'

....or at least, that's what I thought at first.

After that, Pegasus-san, Kate and dad kept on catching sweetfish ceaselessly, while I caught nothing.

'Ugh...'



With my companions catching fish like crazy, why was it that I was getting nothing... This is really annoying.

'Oh wow~ The conditions are super-good today! Catching these many is really incredi- oh...'

Smiling as she dropped fish into a bucket, Kate's smile turned to an awkward look as she saw me.

'Ahaha, oh my, it seems your battle has only just begun. Don't worry, onii-san.'

'Um... er... is there a secret trick to it?' I asked her.

'Hm... secret trick... poop... poop... saying poop would be what Maria would do...'

'Don't bring up poop and don't bring up Maria here, will you?'

'Hm... honestly speaking, it's all about eliminating distracting thoughts. You can't think of other things, you need to angle with an empty mind.'

'....'

At first I wanted to say 'Also, don't bring up these kinds of spiritual theories...', but the mention of distracting thoughts reminded me that I do have a lot of unresolved issues.

Going out with Yukimura. Yukimura and Rika's vicious relationship. My feelings for Rika not yet having faded. Exams and dreams for the future. Yozora, Sena and Kobato.

Perhaps carrying these matters in my mind propagated down through the fishing line...

'An empty mind, huh... that's difficult...'

'You don't have to think that hard about it. You just have to watch the river or stare blankly at the distant scenery, and you'll be able to naturally empty your mind.'

Kate smiled as she reached to pick up her fishing rod once again-

'...whoa!?'

Her feet slipped and she lost her balance.

Watch out□□!

'Uuooh!'

The one who grabbed her to break her fall was my dad.

'Are you okay?'

'Ah, yes... thank you.' Kate said, her face reddening.

---

1 – Written as 永礼 - 永 means Eternal and 礼 means Gratitude (there is no such combination in Jap thus I explained these words individually), they are collectively read as Nagare meaning flow

2 – Its full meaning can only be grasped in Jap:

An interjection for pondering is うん (u|n), trick in Jap is コツ (Ko|tsu) and うんコ (u|n|ko) means shit

In the sentence Kate says うんコツ which is her pondering for any tricks to teach the MC but his leads her to うんコ as she has heard Maria speak of this frequently.

3 – I know it's confusing, but I chose not to change the words to preserve the meaning. Kate was probably trying to say that though it was in the wrong order, would Bro still like to have a new mother  
The right order being – 1. Date, 2. Propose, 3. Meet Family, etc.

Interesting note:

ボウズ (bo|u|zu) is a slang used to refer to someone as lad. However, it can also be used in fishing to mean not fishing even single fish of a specific type.



'Okay. Be a bit more careful.'

Dad lightly patted Kate on the head, and helped her pick up the fishing rod that had fallen to the ground, while Kate watched him with an strangely warm gaze.



In the end, I fished for over an hour more, but not even one fish took the bait, so I gave up on fishing and went to cook the sweetfish the others had caught.

Pegasus-san had prepared wire netting, a wok pan, knives, salt and oil, so that the sweetfish could be broiled with salt or deep fried to be enjoyed on the spot. It was super-tasty... but if I it had been fish I had caught myself, it would have been even better.

We caught fish and we ate fish, and it wasn't until around three in the afternoon that we began preparing to head home.

'My, my... today was really fun, Onii-san'

Kate said to me as I was filling a bag with trash.

'Yeah, it was fun.'

Although I didn't catch any fish, it was still fun. We figured it would be boring to young children, so we didn't bring Maria or Kobato along, but eating fried, freshly caught fish on the spot was really amazing, so next time we'll bring them along.

'By... by the way, Onii-san.'

'Hm?'

'...you already have a little sister... but would you by any chance want a new mother?'

'Eh? .....EEEEEH!?!?!?!'

Kate's entire face had gone red as she was stealing glances at my dad, while innumerable question marks appeared in my mind.

From that day on, Kate time and time again came over to our house with Maria to cook for us, and sometimes went on fishing trips with my dad... just how is this going to end...



# Chapter 11: Kobato and Maria

One evening, when I was studying in my room as usual, Dad came into my room looking for me.

'Hey. Studying diligently?'

'Yeah. I am.' [1]

I nodded in response, while feeling puzzled as to why he came looking for me.

'Preparing for the exams?'

'Yeah.'

What I was studying right now wasn't homework. I was reviewing the second year's math courses. The plum rain season [2] had ended and early summer had arrived.

In this season, third year students across the nation would be slowly preparing for the university entrance exams.

'Ah. Good, good.'

He craned his neck looking at my notebook, nodding. Speaking of which, I had already mentioned to Dad that I wanted to be a teacher in the future, and that I was aiming for a teachers university. He didn't have any opinions on that, and told me to do my best.

'Kodaka, have you been able to keep up with the schoolwork?'

'Um... it's been going alright... but if I don't work hard on preparing for and reviewing lessons, I can't keep up.'

'Is that so....'

Dad's face took on a serious expression, and he then said 'So that's

how it is...' with a sigh.

'You're very diligent, so it shouldn't be a problem, but... um...'

'Just what are you getting at?'

Confused, I opened my mouth and asked, and Dad responded in a low voice:

'...do you think Kobato will be able to keep up with St. Chronica's high school section's pace?' [\[3\]](#)

'....!'

Although the answer instantly appeared in my mind, I still hesitated slightly before answering.

'.....to be honest, I think she would have great difficulty doing so.'

My studying abilities were, compared to the national level, in the upper middle. But even I had to spend every day preparing and reviewing, and only then could I manage to keep up with the pace. Frankly speaking, Kobato was an idiot. In last year's mid-term and end of term exams, she failed to pass, and had no choice but to take makeup lessons. With her progress in the middle school section being like this, I had no choice but to say that she would find it extremely difficult to keep up with the even higher pace of the high school section.

'As I thought, it would be too difficult... oh well...'

Dad sighed deeply.

'I see... then it's better to have her go to another school, instead of St. Chronica's high school section.'

St. Chronica academy's middle school section fed directly into the high school section, so if she just wanted to go on to the next level of school, then even Kobato should be able to pull it off.

We even had connections with the academy chairman.



However, even though she'd be able to get in, we knew she wouldn't be able to keep up with the schoolwork...

'...I also think that would be for the best.'

Just as I agreed with Dad's opinion-

'NO!!'

A scream came from the doorway. Me and Dad turned our heads to look, as Kobato came into the room with a downcast gaze.

'Ko- kobato... did you hear...?'

Dad embarrassedly scratched his head. Kobato nodded and looked at Dad.

'I... I... want to go to the hi-high school section...'

Even though she was stammering, Kobato still managed to express her wish clearly. Dad took on a pained expression.

'Ah... but, Kobato... rather than struggling to stay in this school, wouldn't finding a school that suits your own level be bet-'

'I WANT TO STAY!'

Kobato interrupted Dad, looking like she was about to cry.

'...Kobato. By the time you read the high school section, I will already have graduated, you know? After all, I definitely won't be held back a year.'

I reminded Kobato, just in case.

'I know.'

Kobato murmured in response.

'...Even so you want to go to the high school section?'

'Yeah.'

Kobato nodded.

'...Why?'

'.....'

Kobato lowered her head and remained quiet for a while.

'...because all of my friends are there.'

She answered in a small voice, her face red.

'Eh? What did you say?'

The person who couldn't read the mood wasn't me. It was Dad. Stupid old Dad. Kobato raised her head and glared at him.

'BECAUSE!! ALL OF MY FRIENDS ARE THERE!!'

This time, she put enough force behind her words that it was impossible not to hear her.

As if she wanted to make this declaration to the entire world, she screamed out loud.



After that, Kobato, me and Dad together discussed what Kobato wanted.

'Is that so... ah, friends are important...'

said Dad, deeply moved from having had a close friend for over 20 years himself.

Kobato solemnly nodded.

'However, school is not for making friends. Especially high school, high school is not even mandatory.'

'...Auugh.'

Kobato's expression face twisted for an instant.

'...so I have a condition. If you can fulfill my requirements, I will let you go on to the high school section.'

'....!'

The conditions Dad laid out were: You cannot fail even one subject in the end of term exams, and your score has to exceed the class average in three subjects. The middle school section, just like the high school section, used a two-semester system, so the end of term exams were held in september after the end of the summer vacation. If you started studying now, this condition absolutely wasn't hard to fulfill.

...then again, this was about Kobato after all.

She didn't have the habit of studying at home at all and didn't do her summer homework, instead spending all her time playing around, which led to her troubling the Neighbor's club. Even the winter homework she put off until the last day, at which point she had dad help her out.

For the sake of getting Kobato to exceed the class average when she was in this state... as expected, only an exceptional teacher would be able to help her.

Thus, the next day after school.

'...I'll do it.'

When I begged Yozora, who was sitting in the library teaching Hinata-senpai, to teach Kobato, she immediately agreed.

'That's great. You're the only one I can turn to for this.'

Kobato liked Yozora a lot, and Yozora was good at teaching others. I didn't think there was anyone better suited to teaching Kobato.

Yozora blushed slightly, and gave off a snort.

'...I just finished having this idiot practice what was covered in the third grade of middle school. I might as well have her and Sumeragi compete. If she gets a rival, then perhaps she will be more serious...'

'Haha, surely Kobato wouldn't be able to keep up with a third year (second time) like Hinata-senpai, right?'

I said with a laugh to the stern-faced Yozora. Yozora gave Hinata a look as though she was looking at a piece of trash and Hinata kept her gaze fixed on her books as cold sweat ran down her skin. Eeek...

'...um, Hinata-senpai... you'll be able to graduate together with us, right...?'

'....'

Hinata-senpai powerlessly let her head slump, saying nothing. Seriously... was it that bad...?

I recalled what Dad said yesterday night.

Finding a school that suits one's own level would be good... Hinata-senpai was living proof of this.



After having discussed with Yozora, I walked by the church only to stumble upon Maria, who had been sent out to sweep up litter but had ended up goofing off, drawing images of poop on the ground. Yozora was studying for exams herself, so she most likely wouldn't be able to help out both Hinata-senpai and Kobato all the time, so I had to find another teacher and the only one I could ask was Maria.

Because...

'Eh...? I don't want to teach that poop-vampire.'

Maria showed an unwilling expression with all her face.

'...actually, if Kobato doesn't reach the average score in the upcoming end of term exams, then there will be no way for her to go on to the high school section.'

'WHA-!? Tha-that would be terrible!'

'That's why I'm begging you. That jerk really wants to go on to the

high school section.'

'Muuh... it can't be helped! That jerk really is helpless, so it's up to the genius that is me to help that pile of poop! Because, I really want that jerk to go on to the high school section!'

'Okay, I'll leave this to you, Maria.'

'Got it!'

Because... Maria is Kobato's friend.

While us high school students were again and again being confused and causing conflicts, Maria and Kobato immediately fought each other and then immediately became friends.

The ones who first achieved the Neighbor's Club's goal of 'Making friends' were it's two youngest members.

'Oniichan! Where is that poop-vampire?'

'She just left the middle school section. She's probably on the bus headed here.'

'That so, huh? Then I'll call her over here at once. Oniichan, your phone! Lend me your phone!'

...the young nun and the middle school transfer student.

Two people who normally wouldn't have met, met and became friends...

Perhaps this can be said to be the greatest achievement of the weird association that is the Neighbor's club.

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[1] In this translation, I've chosen to use 'yeah' to represent the japanese wordless 'umu' sound of assent.

[2] Plum rain season, or the East asian rainy season, is caused by precipitation along a persistent stationary front known as the Mei-Yu front for nearly two months during the late spring and early summer

between eastern Russia, China, Korea, and Japan.

[3] St. Chronica Academy has its own elementary school, middle school and high school (translated here as 'sections' of the academy), meaning a student can advance through all three levels of education without transferring to another school.



# Chapter 12: Magical Sword Correspondence Course

One week had passed since Kobato had started studying seriously in preparation for the end of term exams.

I asked her in an indirect way about how it was going with Yozora and Maria.

'Kukuku... My magical power hath fully recovered, I need naught but tap into the akashic records. God's cleansing fire strikes no terror into me...'

'...Sumeragi isn't necessarily worse than this idiot. She can at least multiply 9 by 9, and she can recognize a lot of difficult kanji.'

'Poop!'

Seems like it's not going all that well.

If only there was something I could do for her... three days ago, when she was enthusiastically staying up late at night studying, I made her some ramen as a midnight snack, but after she ate them she fell asleep. I realized afterwards that ramen might not be the best midnight snack.

...In the evening, as I was thinking about this while checking the house mailbox, I found inside it an advertisement leaflet addressed to "Hasegawa Kobato-san".

Let me see... "'Magical Sword Correspondence Course' middle school version... you can still do it! Getting to 20 points above the average is not just a dream! Use the strongest weapon against exams, Excalibur [\[1\]](#), to smash down the walls blocking the way to success in school!"



That was the summary of the "Magical Sword Correspondence Course". We received it quite a few times before, but I always threw it straight into the trash, without ever looking inside.

Besides the summary of the middle school edition, there was also a summary of the high school edition, whose advertisements were the same.

The strongest weapon against exams, smashing the walls blocking the way to success in school, huh...

Kobato's end of term exams does admittedly make one worry, but it would be difficult to say that I myself was safe and sound. My record of suspension could definitely have a negative effect... If there really was a way to get to 20 points over the average in one go, I really wanted to know it.

I went inside the house, and without any expectations opened up the "Magical Sword Correspondence Course" high school editions introduction letter, finding inside not only the registration form but also a small booklet.

The booklet was a manga, seemingly in order to use comics to explain to us in an easily understandable way the contents of the course.

The style of the manga was slightly similar to shoujo manga [\[2\]](#), and of high quality. Perhaps they had asked a professional mangaka [\[3\]](#) to draw it.

I was impressed by the work ("This is really well-done") and began reading the manga.

Main character: Masamune [\[4\]](#) (a cool and laid back-type bishounen) From the first year to the summer of the third year he was completely committed to club activities, but as the summer break ended and he began to study for entrance exams, his studies we're not going well, and in the mock exams his results were just barely passing grades.

His strong rival from the same club: Kotetsu [\[5\]](#) of the same grade (a

wild and crazy-type bishounen) somehow still managed to get the first place in the mock exams.

'That jerk is clearly doing nothing but playing around in the club, when did he manage to get so far ahead of me...!?'

Masamune was utterly defeated. It was as if the heavens themselves dealt him the final blow when he accidentally encountered Kotetsu confessing to his childhood friend Claíomh Solais [\[6\]](#) , the Sword of Light, (a blonde-hair, blue-eyes-type bishoujo) towards whom Masamune had long harbored secret feelings of affection. Claíomh did however respond 'Please let me think about it before giving you my answer', but her cheeks were bright red, so she definitely didn't hate him.

Masamune felt heart-broken, feeling anger and disgust at everything. After school, he wandered about outside instead of studying. Suddenly, Kotetsu appeared, lashing out at Masamune.

'Masamune, what are you doing!?'

'What do you care! I'm leaving the club because I'm nothing but a stupid student who can't study...'

'The Masamune I know definitely isn't such a good-for-nothing!'

'You can say what you want! I'm already beyond saving! I'm different from you, and my mock exam results are super-bad compared to yours, and even Claíomh likes you-'

'You idiot!'

Kotetsu gave Masamune a punch.

'...Actually, there is a secret behind my changes...'

'A secret...?'

'Yeah... I enrolled in the Magical Sword Correspondence Course.'

'The Magical Sword Correspondence Course!?'

Kotetsu then told him in detail about the many benefits of the Magical Sword Correspondence Course. Masamune was at first still not entirely convinced. Then he thought that since such a strong rival recommended the course this much, that was even more reason to believe in the power of the Magical Sword Correspondence Course.

'Mom, I want to enroll in the Magical Sword Correspondence Course!'

'Mom hasn't seen you put on such an earnest look in a long time.'

Masamune convinced his mother (Beautiful people. They give off an indescribably sexy feeling) and started taking the Magical Sword Correspondence Course.

Then, after little more than a month, Masamune's academic abilities skyrocketed, and at the following mock exams he got the second place, easily catching up with his cram-school classmates. At the next mock exam after that, he even got the first place.

'These problems were all in the Magical Sword Correspondence Course!'

He even managed to finish the university entry exams with perfect scores. How amazing!

After Masamune smoothly passed the entrance exams, he confessed to Claíomh on the high school graduation day.

'I've also always liked you!'

The two of them embraced. Then, Kotetsu appeared.

'Hehe, as expected I'm no match for Masamune...'

'It's all thanks to you, Kotetsu, and the Magical Sword Correspondence Course, that I became who I am today. Please take care of me in university as well!'

HAPPY END!

'A- amazing...'

As I finished the manga, I was so touched that my whole body was trembling.

It seemed that just by enrolling in this "Magical Sword Correspondence Course", not only would you be able to improve your academic abilities, but you'd also have success in love and have blossoming friendships with your friends. It felt unbelievable that I had missed such an amazing thing, I really must have been an idiot!

'Dad, I want to sign up for the "Magical Sword Correspondence course"!'!

I exclaimed as soon as dad came home.



Not long after having posted the registration form, the study materials from the Magical Sword Correspondence course arrived. If it's this fast, there was no surprise it was something that riajuu [7] were using.

One day, I brought the study materials and the advertisement manga with me to the clubroom.

'To think that there are actually such amazing tools in this world!'

Sena said as she finished reading the manga, touched to the point that her eyes shone.

'Muu... so the riajuu of this world all use this kind secret technique, huh...'

'The Magical Sword Correspondence course... Rika knew this existed, but Rika has no interest in grades, and so ignored it... to think that it could have other effects besides improving one's academic abilities.'

Yozora and Rika were excited as well.

We immediately began examining the Magical Sword Correspondence Course study materials.

The entrance exam problem set consisted of a combination of English

glossaries and a large number of pictures with easy to follow explanations of world history, etc. All in all, it felt like something that would come in handy for entrance exam studies or school courses.

For the purpose of taking exams and having a fulfilling youth, this was certainly the strongest weapon (Excalibur).

We worked together and finished one month's of study materials.

'Phew... it's done!'

Immersed in feelings of smug exhaustion, I snorted [8] . I had a kind of having-improved-to-above-the-average-in-one-go feeling.

'This problem book is not bad. I'll take it with me for reference when I'm teaching the idiot and Sumeragi.'

Yozora gave a contented smile, and Rika said laughingly:  
'Occasionally solving these kinds of simple problems can be good brain teaser. It's fun, isn't it!'

However, Sena still wore an unreadable expression.

'Hm... is it true that by solving such an easy problem set, your school life can become fulfilling?'

'Of course it can. By solving the Magical Sword Correspondence Course's problems you can decrease the time you spend on studying, and you don't have to go to cram school while still increasing your academic ability, so the time you saved you can use to efficiently... efficiently... huh?'

My voice grew weaker and weaker.

'... I usually don't study, and I don't plan on going to cram school either.'

Sena said.

Thinking about it calmly, the main character of the manga was an active member of a sports club. From the start, he had a mutual

competitor, a strong rival whom he could learn from, as well as a childhood friend with a mutual affection.

In this way, when he faced a setback in his studies, he was saved by the Magical Sword Correspondence Course, and smoothly proceeded to perfect happy ending- or, in other words, the protagonist of the manga "was a riajuu from the outset and became an even more incredible riajuu".

For someone like Sena who never had to worry about studies, an impossibly idle person, the situation was completely different.

The problem set was well-composed, so for the struggling me and for Yozora who was teaching others, it was very useful, but for Sena it was completely meaningless.

'Even the power of the 'Magical Sword Correspondence Course' is useless for you... you really are a pitiful person...'

Yozora said with a look of pity, while Sena puffed out her chest with pride.

'Fu-fu! The things that you wish for you must rely on your own strength to obtain!'

And with that, the curtain quickly fell on the Neighbors' club activity "Let's take the Magical Sword Correspondence Course!".

Although this was a failure of a club activity, for my coming entrance exams studies, as well as those of Hidaka and Kobato, the Magical Sword Correspondence Course will be a tremendous boon.

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[1] A magical sword from British mythology that could only be wielded by the rightful king of Britain. See wikipedia for the entire story: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Excalibur>

[2] Shoujo manga are comics for girls aged 12-18, usually drawn with an art style clearly distinct from manga aimed at boys. See wikipedia for a longer explanation: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sh%C5%8Djo\\_manga](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sh%C5%8Djo_manga)

[3] Mangaka are authors and/or artists of japanese-style comics.

[4] Masamune was also the name of Gorou Nyuudou Masamune, a legendary swordsmith of the Kamakura period of Japan who made many masterpiece weapons and taught many apprentices. Such is his fame that his name has also been given to various fictional swords long after his death in 1343 AD, such as a magical sword in Chrono Trigger. See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Masamune> for more info.

[5] This character's name is also a reference to the famous swordsmith Nagasone Kotetsu of the Sengoku era of Japanese history. His family served under Ishida Mitsunari before his unfortunate demise. His name has also been used as the name of swords in a number of works of fiction such as Vagabond, Ruroni Kenshin, One Piece, etc. See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nagasone\\_Kotetsu](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nagasone_Kotetsu) for more info

[6] Cláíomh Solais is the name of a magical sword that appears in a number of Irish and Scottish Gaelic folktales. The name roughly translates to "Sword of Light" or "Shining Sword". See the wikipedia article for more info: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cl%C3%ADomh\\_Solais](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cl%C3%ADomh_Solais)

[7] A derogatory slang term for people "who are satisfied with their offline lives" or who "live a fulfilling real life". Made up of the first syllables of riaru (リアル, translit. of "real") and juujitsu (充実, fulfilling).

[8] As can sometimes be seen in anime, manga and even emoji, Japanese sometimes uses snorting as a positive action to symbolize feelings of triumph and success.





# Chapter 13: BBQ

One day in August, the Neighbor's club had gathered outside for training.

The location was, just like last year, the Kashiwazaki family villa, and just like last year, we had come here to stay the night. We rode the train for two and a half hours, and then, carrying our overweight luggage on our backs, we walked for an hour from the closest train station. It was really hard to get to the villa.

After having taken our luggage to the villa, we changed into our swimsuits and ran straight down to the sea. Beneath the endless, clear blue sky, we formed a line facing the sea just like last year.

'...Okay, now let's erase the disgrace from last year. Let's show it the power of us who have gotten closer to becoming riajuu... make ready!'

'IT'S THE SEA!'

'IT'S THE SEAAAAA-!'

'I- it's the sea... this so embarrassing....'

' IT'S THE SEAAA -cough-cough-cough! Cough! As expected, Rika can't stand the sea breeze...' 'Ku-ku-ku...!'

'IT'S□□ THE□□ SEA□□ YEAH□□□□!!'

...It was just like last year, completely messed up.

Compared to last year, there was however one decisive difference in that we were missing one club member.

I asked for the club members' permission to also invite Yukimura to come along and participate in the training, but Yukimura said 'I've

already left the club", carefully declining the invite.

Although I did go with her to the Sea Dragon amusement park last week (it still hasn't gone bankrupt, probably thanks to last year's contributions from the heavily-discounted ticket sales) on a date... I still wanted her to come with us.

Having become third years, everyone has been busy. Seeing all the club members gathered in the club room after school has become relatively rare, but at the times when the whole club gets together, Yukimura still stays away. No matter how you look at it, you get a feeling of lacking something.

In my heart, I still consider the club as consisting of me, Yozora, Sena, Rika, Kobato, Maria and Yukimura. All seven of us.



We played by the seaside until sunset, then we began the most important activity of the day.

It is known as The BBQ - grilling meat!

BBQ - I don't know why normies always write it as "BBQ", but this time I will deliberately use these three alphabetical characters to express it.

A seaside BBQ!

Even just writing it gives off an astonishingly blinding feeling of riajuu.

The Neighbors Club had no one with BBQ experience, so like always, I researched the methods of BBQ in advance to be prepared for it.

We setup two small grills and put in charcoal.

Using bamboo skewers to attach the meat, vegetables, sausages and seafood brought along by everyone, we placed them on the metal webbing to be grilled.

After a while, the hunger-inducing aroma accompanying the spurting

sounds of the meat and fish started to spread along the seaside.

‘I want to lick them...’

‘I wanna lick, I wanna lick...’

Kobato and Maria were licking their lips. It seemed they couldn't wait any longer.

‘Hey~ Onii-chan! Can we eat them now?’

‘Not yet. Wait a bit longer.’

I was both fanning the fire and watching to see if the food had gotten properly grilled.

GROOOOOOOWL~~~~ I don't know whose stomach growled.

‘Aha! What's that? Can't you wait any longer, Yozora?’

‘You- you're wrong! That just now wasn't me! It was your stomach, wasn't it!?’

‘Of course not! My stomach's would make a more... high-class sound!’

‘It's better if your stomach makes this kind of noise! You perverted, disgraceful wild beast!’

‘Haa!? Your gaze is like a bloodthirsty hyena's!’

Yozora and Sena started bickering with each other.

After recognizing each other as friends, the two of them still carried on as before, fighting time and time again.

Going shopping together like two sisters, going to the bathroom together, eating bentos together - that kind of friendship of two young girls, it was something completely foreign to them.

I meekly watched them, and picked out a skewer of shrimp and scallop that had been grilled just right to hand off to Rika, the actual perpetrator of the stomach growling.

‘Here.’

‘Thanks.’

...as she reached out to take the skewer, our hands carelessly touched, but I did not feel my heart skip a beat and my face didn't grow hot.

It had already been eight months since Christmas.

I had gotten used to hiding my feelings a long time ago.

‘Ah-! Only letting Rika it is too mean! Onii-chan, I also want to eat meat!’

‘A- an-chan! I also want meat!’

‘...Alright, alright, alright. I get it, you couple of carnivores.’

‘Please give me a bit less vegetables!’

‘I also want less vegetables!’

‘No can do. I'm going to give you skewers with especially many vegetables.’

「(´□ω□`)」 「(´□ω□`)」

After the skewers had been given out to everyone, we all tucked in at the same time.

With the sun setting into the sea as background, we all had a barbecue on the beach.

At that exact moment, we were the perfect riajuu.



After finishing the food, we put out the fire and went back to the villa to wash ourselves.

While waiting for everyone to finish showering, Sena suggested that we gather and tell ghost stories like last year, but she met with my

strong opposition and it came to nothing.

...because last year, Yozora told a ghost story so frightening that no one dared go to the bathroom alone, so every time someone needed to go, they made me come with them. I wasn't about to repeat that disaster.

In the end, due to Kobato and Maria falling into the land of dreams, the high school section of the club started playing a game of poker, but due to the exhaustion from having played around in the sea earlier, the game dissolved after an hour.



# Chapter 14: Dawnbreak

I went to bed early, and so woke up early.

I used the smartphone that I had bought at the end of the last year but still not gotten used to to check the time. It was only half past four in the morning.

I opened the window and looked outside. The sky was turning marble white [\[1\]](#) .

Taking this opportunity, I decided to go for a walk by the shore at dawn, casually leaving the room in Kashiwazaki family's villa, the room that I had shared with Yukimura last year, descending the stairs and arriving outside.

Coming down from the hill, I saw a lone girl gazing out at the sea.

She was wearing a black short-sleeved shirt and black jersey trousers.

Her black, mid-length hair was swaying slightly in the sea breeze.

'Yozora.'

I called out as I went over to her, and Yozora slowly turned her head around.

'Kodaka? You're up early.'

'That's because I went to bed early. Since we didn't have a horror storytelling get-together this time, I didn't get woken up at night, so I could sleep really well.'

Yozora faintly let out a bitter laugh.

'The story of Yamiko, huh... that was a true story, though' she said suddenly.

Yamiko was the ghost that appeared in the horror story that Yozora used to drag us all into an abyss of fear last year.

Girl Y was, for relationship reasons, subjected to vicious bullying by her close friend Girl A , to the point of being driven to suicide. After death, she became the eponymous ghost Yamiko, able to possess the friend who betrayed her and kill them.

'Oh.'

Misconstruing it as a joke, I dismissed it with a laugh, but Yozora's face remained serious, and she continued:

'In middle school, I had a friend. I had a friend previously... err, a real one, that is.'

'When you emphasize it that much, it sounds like a lie... I believe you though.'

'...Okay. Then it's fine.'

Yozora got back to the point.

'That friend and I were in the same year, but in different classes. The first time we spoke was when she stumbled upon me as I was standing in a second-hand bookstore reading shounen manga. Surprised, she told me: "So Mikazuki-san reads books like these too, huh?" That person [2] was part of the beautiful girls clique of my year's students, so in order to drive her away from me, I simply pretended to be obsessed with shounen manga and shounen anime, in an attempt to show her that the two of us were people of different worlds. The end result was that she super-happily told me that she was actually also really into shounen manga. From then on, I often spoke with her after school and on our days off as well as going to bookstores together. I got along really well with her, and thanks to her being surrounded by friends at school, she was both a good speaker and a good listener, completely unlike Meat. Honestly speaking, I was extremely happy, so happy that we made matching email addresses.' [3]

Yozora's email address was "eternalfriendship2".



I had always wondered why there was a '2' at the end... in the end, the reason was that it was one of a pair. The '1' must have belonged to that friend.

...Up to this point, you could still think it was a happy-go-lucky story of friendship.

However, this story was doomed to lead to a BAD END [4] .

Yozora looked miserable as she continued her story:

'After I had made friends with that person, a few months passed... and some of my classmates started bullying me. They used some of old bullying tricks. Ignoring me, hiding my stuff, not passing on information that I had missed, and so on. That person also knew I was being bullied, and when we were together she told me "tell me if it starts feeling difficult" and "I'm the only one who's on your side". Just by hearing her say that, I felt like I had been saved. Because I didn't want to involve a friend in this, I took great pains not to approach her in school. The methods used by my classmates to bully me gradually grew worse, but my friend promised to always remain a pillar of support for me, so I continued to put up with it. However, I didn't want my friend to keep on worrying about me, so I decided to solve the problem myself.'

'To solve it yourself...'

'...In short, I waited until the people bullying me during class were alone, and then, one by one, I followed them to deserted places and forced them to tell me why they were bullying me. When they weren't in a group, they were nothing but helpless trash... it usually only took two punches to the stomach to make them confess. And like that, I was able to find out the true identity of the shadowy figure behind the scenes. Your guess was correct, the culprit was that person... I couldn't forgive that person for betraying a friend. If she hated me, she should have told me directly, because I can't forgive someone who likes shounen manga and heroes like me doing such vile things. So I decided to take revenge on her. I pretended to not know who the culprit was, and slowly drove her towards a nervous breakdown. That person feared supernatural things the most, so used the opportunity offered when she went to the bathroom to turn of the

lights, stealthily blowing air at her and pulling her hair, writing curses on the window by her seat and in her notebook, under the guise of a supernatural phenomenon. I also spread the rumor of 'Yamiko, the ghost who kills people who betray their friends.'

'Ho-hold on!'

'What is it, Kodaka?'

'Are you saying that Yamiko's model... was you?'

'I told you it was a true story.'

Yozora looked a bit smug.

I had wanted to say that the story of Yamiko seemed very realistic, and scary, and as it turns out it was all this jerk creating a ghost story out of her own actions...

'...in the end, that person gave up, and rushed over to me to apologize, confessing what she'd done. The reason that she made my classmates bully me seems to have been that the boy she was in love with loved me. In other words, it was jealousy. Bullying her own friend for the sake of her love- it really was too stupid. It makes you want to throw up. It really makes me angry that I considered such a piece of scum to be a friend. Aaaah, it's so stupid I could die, so totally, totally stupid...'

Yozora drew a deep breath.

'...Although I think doing these kinds of is stupid...'

She suddenly showed a kind look-

and smiled at my bewildered self.

'Now I can actually more or less understand her feelings.'

Yozora set off towards the sea.

'...Right, I haven't said it directly yet.'

'Eh?'

'...I just have one thing to say, and I want you to engrave it into your heart.'

She turned away from me and towards the sea.

Taking a deep breath, she yelled out loud:

Kodakaaaa-!

I like youuuuu-!

The strength of her voice seemed enough to reach the other side of the sea.

If you were to express it using light novels, it was just like those idiots who couldn't even understand copyright, who blissfully upload scanned pages to the internet, and those dead monkeys who believe they can take intentionally selected excerpts of light novels and based only on that pass judgement on what kind of work it is and as if by spinal reflex mock them with "recent light novels www" [\[5\]](#) , that kind of hopeless and desperate confession of love. [\[6\]](#)

When Yozora had yelled until her lungs were completely void of air, she breathed heavily for a while, and then turned back towards me with a calm expression.

'That's why I want you to go out with me.'

...why are all the girls around me this cool? As I thought this, I wasn't running away, I wasn't pretending I didn't hear, I wasn't playing dumb and I wasn't pretending Yozora had simply shouted at the sea itself, but instead I looked her straight in the eyes and in a normal tone of voice used a common expression to reject her.

'I'm sorry.'

Yozora seemed to have predicted my answer as well, as she didn't seem particularly shaken, but simply made a deflated pout with her mouth.

'I've always felt... even though I knew the outcome... it really was too normal. At least give a funny reaction.'

'Even though you say so...'

'Also, you almost immediately responded... couldn't you at least hesitate a bit?'

'Err... even if I hesitated, my answer wouldn't have changed...'

'...why? Because you're already going out with someone? Or because there's someone else you like?'

'That's not it.'

I slowly shook my head.

'I've never liked you in a romantic way.'

'...is that so...'

This answer might have seemed uncaring, but to me, these words contained my greatest sincerity. I felt that even if no one else heard them, only Yozora would be able to truly understand their meaning.

Yozora furrowed her brow in annoyance, and as if she was angry said:

'...is that so... since it's like that, there's nothing that can be done about it...'

She then sat down in the sand.

'...what can I say... I'm sorry.'

'Don't apologize... I'm used to things that nothing can be done about.'

The corner of Yozora's mouth formed a self-deprecating smile, and she picked up a handful of sand, throwing it out towards the sea.

'...Haa... and here I did my best to say it... Tomo-chan, I was rejected.'

At the mention of the air-friend I hadn't met in a long time, I couldn't

help but laugh.

'Tomo- chan's still around, huh.'

'Of course. Tomo-chan will always be my friend.'

Yozora suddenly laughed bitterly.

'...Speaking of which, Tomo-chan was also born from the incident with Yamiko.'

'Oh.'

'...when that person painstakingly apologized to me, it just felt so laughable that I wanted to mock her a bit, so I pretended to talk to 'a friend that could not be seen' in front of her. Even though it was just a short act, that person got so scared that she ran off crying.'

'...I can imagine how that looked.'

Because Yozora's acting skills were top-notch...

For a middle-school girl who was afraid of the supernatural, seeing someone suddenly start talking to an air-friend in front of her must have been terrifying.

'...After that, that person never even got near me. My only remaining friend was Tomo-chan.'

'...'

'...Hey, don't give me that kind of pity-filled look. I told you a long time ago, I highly recommend making an air-friend. Want to try it out?'

'No need. Because I have friends.'

'Is that so. That's too bad.'

I answered with a bitter laugh, and Yozora also showed a heart-broken smile.

'...hey, Kodaka.'

'Yeah.'

'...just what kind of relationship do we have?'

'...'

It's not love.

And it's not friendship either.

You could call us childhood friends, but the time we spent together is too short, and our hearts weren't connected either, but we had still had far too great influences on each other.

Me and Rika. Me and Yukimura. Me and Sena. Yozora and Sena. Yozora and Rika. Sena and Yukimura.

It was different to all of the above. That which existed only between Mikazuki Yozora and Hasegawa Kodaka, was an unfathomable relationship.

'...Comrades-in-arms, right?'

Bearing the same wounds from old times, and having fought at the same time.

Even though we'd had different childhoods from each other, having different people we treasured, only this fact could not be changed.

Hearing my answer, Yozora's face took on a look of being on the verge of tears.

'Comrades-in-arms... hm, that's not too bad.'

'Right?'

If you were to ask if the word "comrades-in-arms" was a perfect description of the relationship between me and Yozora, then I would say it absolutely isn't.

We both clearly knew that words had no way of describing our relationship, but even so, we still had to painstakingly put a name on

it, in order to bring the matter to a conclusion.

I pushed down the intense feeling of loneliness that suddenly rose up and stubbornly put on a smile.

The sun was rising.

Dawn had broken.

On the infantile story of Sora and Taka, the curtains had now truly fallen.

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1 Literally "fish-stomach white".

2 The wording used to refer to the person in question is difficult to translate literally into english and varies in tone depending on the context, but in this context it can be thought of as "that jerk" or "that bitch".

3 This story was not portrayed in the anime, but did make it into volume 16 of the main Haganai manga.

4 This "BAD END" is a reference to a non-canonical failure route of visual novels and dating games.

5 Wwww is the Japanese equivalent of "lolololol". The "w" stands for "笑う" or "warau", meaning "to laugh, laughter".

6 Wow, this feels like it really came from deep within the heart of author, a deliberate showing of his true feelings... wait, do you think he's talking about us?







# Chapter 15 - Another resolution

One morning in August.

Me and Rika had gone to Tokyo together.

Our objective was to attend the largest national convention held twice yearly in summer and winter for selling doujinshi: 'Comic bazaar', or for short, 'Comiba' [\[1\]](#) .

Game companies, manga and anime publishers, etc all attended Comiba. Up until now, Rika had always asked the employees at the company she helped out to buy her doujinshi and merchandise, but it seemed that she had always really wanted to go and have a look herself. This time, she had finally made up her mind to attend Comiba.

'...will you be okay? I saw in the news that Comiba has extreme amounts of people attending, you know?'

When Rika told me about it, I worriedly asked her this.

Last year at the amusement park and Tooya station, the massive crowds had made her feel sick.

Although she had gone to Tooya City many times this year, as well as department stores, theme parks and other places with a lot of people, and had slowly started getting used to crowds, I still had no confidence at all that she would be able to bear Comiba with it's several hundred thousand attendees [\[2\]](#) .

'To be honest, Rika isn't feeling very confident...'

Rika answered uneasily, with a faint smile.

'Then it's best to give up on it...'

'No, Rika is going. Rika wants to give it her all to go see it.'

'Give it her all to go see it', huh.

There was no way I could turn down a friend who wanted to give it her all.

'Rika wants to give it her all to go see it. But... it's still a bit scary, so-'

'I'll go as well.' 'Kodaka should come as well.'

We said in unison.

In the present.

Me and Rika took the Shinkansen from Tooya station to Tokyo.

Even though it was clearly still early, Tooya station was filled with people. Rika already seemed a bit nauseous, but as we had pre-preserved seats on the Shinkansen, we could sit down during the journey which gave her time to recover.

But as soon as we arrived at Tokyo station, we were engulfed in a crowd many times larger than that of Tooya station.

It was impossible to walk at your own pace. Even I found it difficult to breath.

Walking by my side, Rika's face had turned pale white and she had gotten a cold sweat. Her condition seemed grave.

'For starters, let's push our way outside.'

I grabbed Rika's hand and broke away from the slow-moving crowd, headed for the refuge of the sidewalks.

'Haa... haa...'

Rika leaned against the wall, breathing heavily.

'What if all these people are headed for the convention?'

She said with an expression of being on the verge of tears.

'That would just be ridiculous, wouldn't it...'

I said with a pained smile.

We bought tea from some nearby vending machines, and after a brief rest, once again headed towards the Comiba venue.

However...

'Geh...'

As we rode the subway, Rika pressed close to me, her breathing pained.

The amount of people on the subway made the crowds at Tokyo station seem like nothing. Not only was it noisy, it also reeked of sweat.

'Ri-Rika, are you okay...?'

Me and Rika stood so close we were almost hugging. From my viewpoint I could only see her hair, and so I couldn't see how her pallor or expression looked.

A few minutes after boarding the subway train, I had felt nervous because she had pressed to close to me, but now I simply didn't have the energy to be worried.

'...feels like... not so good...'

Rika replied in a voice as weak as an insect's chirp.

...seems like she really won't last much longer.

'Let's get off at the next station for now.'

As soon as I suggested it, she weakly nodded.

Not long after, the train arrived at the next station, and the doors opened.

The crowd inside the train did not move at all. We wouldn't be able to get off like this.

'Excuse me, we're getting off!'

I said in a loud voice, but the surrounding passengers were as still as a mountain.

Beside me, Rika hung her head listlessly.

'Haa... get... get the fuck out of the way, you damned trash...!'

'Wha-!?'

I glared at the passengers by the doors and lowered my voice, and a small path leading of the train formed in the crowd.

I led Rika by the hand towards the doors, struggling squeeze out off the jam-packed train.

'Haa...' 'Huu...'

We stood on the platform, breathing deep gulps of air.

The benches were empty, so I Rika there and sat down side by side.

'...haa... to think that the trains going to Comiba were actually this crowded...'

Rika was spent.

'Yeah... that was awful... to think there are those who wouldn't hesitate to go to these lengths to buy goods...'

I was just accompanying Rika here, having little interest in doujinshi, manga or anime, so I couldn't quite understand this.

'...what do you want to do? Do you still want to go to the convention?'

I asked Rika, and she weakly shook her head.

'I give up, let's go back...'

'...the trains won't be this crowded all day, if we wait a few hours we should be able to go there though?'

'...yeah... but even if we go to the convention, the trains on the way

will be crowded again... this is as far as I can get this time...'

'Is that so? Then we'll go back, I guess...'

'Yeah...'

Rika nodded.

'...actually, Kodaka...'

'Hm?'

'Rika is fine already.'

Rika was faintly blushing, slightly embarrassed by holding my hand.

'Uwaaaah! So-sorry!'

I immediately let her hand go, and Rika giggled.

'No need to be so panicked.'

'We-well...'

I couldn't look at her straight, so I looked instead at the opposite platform-

'It's because I like you.'

I said in a small voice.

'....'

Rika went silent.

Another crowded train arrived at the platform, and the left, the silence between us persisted until we could no longer hear the sound of the train. Then, in a calm voice, Rika spoke:

'Rika wants to be your friend. It's not possible for us to become girlfriend and boyfriend.'

'Is that so.'

'Yeah.'

I knew what her reply would be, so I wasn't particularly shaken.

Besides, I already had a precious girlfriend in Yukimura, so from the start I hadn't considered the meaning of becoming Rika and I becoming lovers.

...but even so, there was a point to the words that came out of my mouth. I had to let Rika know.

I had felt my heart beating wildly since holding Rika's hand, only now slowing down.

'...so that's how it is...'

I regretfully mumbled to myself. Rika's expression turned confused.

'...what do you mean, "so that's how it is"?''

'Nothing... I was just thinking... saying it clearly, in order to let the other party deal you the final blow, is a very important thing.'

On the morning of the training camp, Yozora had clearly known what my answer would be but still confessed to me. I now understood the reason for that.

Last year's Christmas eve, I was heart-broken.

I discovered that my feelings for Rika were those of love, and learned that Rika did not share those feelings...

...through the means of a text message conversation between Yukimura and Rika. Not by speaking to Rika directly.

This was no good...

Even though I was going out with Yukimura, the feelings I voiced still hadn't disappeared, not matter the amount of time that had passed, but rather they had been buried in my heart all along.

Now, I had finally been liberated.

My feelings for Rika had finally been obliterated, the heart-break had concluded.

Although my chest felt like it was being stabbed with a knife, I still said with a smile:

'Then, please keep on being my friend from now on, Rika.'

'Ah, yeah.'

Rika made a pained smile as she nodded in assent.

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[1] This is most likely a reference to Comiket (Comic Market), a large biannual convention and expo for manga, anime and games held in Tokyo.

[2] This is not an exaggeration. The numbers for 2018's Comiket had the attendee count at 570,000(!) over three days.





# Chapter 16 - A fated encounter

Over the summer break, I diligently studied every day, but I also went with the Neighbors club to the mountains, the sea, the riverside, a summer festival. I also went swimming at the pool with Yukimura, went to the amusement park and to a bonfire, as well as to halfway to Comiba with Rika before turning back. All in all, it was both very busy and a lot of fun. But in the blink of an eye, summer break was over.

It was a few days after school had started, on an August day. I was just entering the Neighbor's club's room along with Sena. Inside, Yozora was sitting alone, reading a book.

Yozora had bandages wrapped around her head.

'Wha-!? What happened to your head!?'

Sena asked in surprise. Yozora's gaze remained fixed at her book as she calmly responded:

'...I simply got a bruise from a fall.'

'A fall...?'

'...Pay it no heed. It's nothing serious.'

Yozora's stiff reply in no way reassured us. At this point, the door to the Neighbor's club suddenly opened, revealing Hinata-senpai.

'Yozora!'

Yozora furrowed her brow, the loathing showing across her entire face.

'...What are you doing here? Idiot sister. Didn't I tell you to self-study today?'

Hinata-senpai turned a deaf ear to Yozora's words, staring at her

sister's bandaged head with a worried look.

'I had a bad feeling so I came here to see you... did mother cause you that injury?'

Yozora kept her eyes closed, and said indignantly:

'...you clearly are stupid, why are your senses so sharp only at time like this?'

'Wha- what do you mean!?'

Hinata-senpai's expression remained serious, and confusedly replied:

'Yesterday, mother... Yozora's and my mother called my house, cursing at us, saying things like 'Using your children charm other people is really despicable'...'

Yozora and Hinata's parents had divorced, and Yozora had remained with their mother, while Hinata choose to go with their father.

'...I told her it had been my own decision to tutor my idiot-sister, that it had nothing to do with father or anyone else... but she didn't listen.'

Yozora began relating her story with a sad expression.

Last night, Yozora's mother had found out about her tutoring Hinata-senpai. She had never forgiven the betrayal by her own husband and her friend, and had therefore kept Yozora and Hinata far from each other. Unwilling to listen to Yozora's explanations, she finally raised her hand at her. Unfortunately, as Yozora was thrown against the wall behind her, she hit a drawer with a vase of flowers on top, which fell down and hit her head... or so she said.

To think that there were parents in this world who would beat their children... even though stories like this made it to the news everyday, knowing that it happened to someone you know still made me feel sick and angry. Even more so given that my father, Pegasus-san and Kusunoki Himeko were all adults worthy of respect.

'Yozora, from today on, come stay with my family for a while.'

Hinata-senpai said with an indignant face.

However, Yozora shook her head in despair.

'...Are you a retard? That will just hurt her even more.'

'But...! You are clearly the one who's been hurt...'

Yozora gave Hinata-senpai, whose eyes were on the verge of tears, a bitter smile.

'...don't cry, idiot sister... I know it would be good to keep my distance from that person for a while, but... haah, there's nothing I can do about it.'

'In that case, come stay with at my house.'

Sena said with a pout.

'What?'

Yozora was dumbstruck.

'I told you to come stay at my house for the time being. My house has a lot of rooms, and the headmaster knows your mother as well, so she should have no objections, right?'

'Bu-but... I don't want to trouble outsiders with my family problems...'

'I am not an 'outsider'!'

Sena screamed. She seemed very angry.

'This is one of those times when you should rely on your friends!'

'....!'

On hearing Sena's words, Yozora froze in place as if hit by lightning, and then softly let out a breath.

'...in that case, I beg of you: please let me stay with you for a while.'

'Okay!'

Sena gave a bright smile, dispelling the heavy atmosphere in the blink of an eye.



Later that day, me, Sena and Yozora arrived at the Kashiwazaki family house.

Why I was there? It was because Yozora had worriedly begged me: 'This is my first time going to a friend's house... please come along with me.' As soon as Sena opened the door, Stella-san came out to meet us.

'Welcome home, ojousama [\[1\]](#) . Kodaka-bocchan, welcome back, and-'

She turned to Yozora, who was nervously standing behind me, trying to hide.

'Nice to meet you for the first time. Mikazuki Yozora-san, I presume? I am Stella, the Kashiwazaki family's butler.'

'Ye-yes! Nice to meet you!'

Yozora replied, her face turning crimson.

Oh right, Yozora hadn't met Stella-san before.

On last year's festival, after we had fired off all the fireworks, we'd had Stella-san drive everyone home, except for Yozora who had left on her own before us, as her hair had been burnt.

'I've long wanted to meet Mikazuki-san in person. I am truly grateful to your friendship with our ojousama.'

'N-no, on- on the contrary I'm the one who's always being taken care of by mea- by Sena-san...'

Yozora was as well-behaved as a borrowed cat [\[2\]](#) , which made Stella-san chuckle lightly.

'Please treat this house as your own. I will prepare tea, so please make your way to the ojousama's room and rest for a while . '

She took her leave and went back inside the house.

Yozora watched Stella-san's retreating back in a daze, and said in a small voice:



'He-hey, Kodaka! Was that super-amazing person really a...!?'

'She did say she was the household butler. Kind of like a housekeeper.'

'Housekeeper... a genuine butler...! Whoa....'

Yozora's eyes were aglow with awe.

...it seems that this girl was of the opinion that 'butlers' equalled 'super-amazing'.

I suddenly remembered that the butler-outfit that Yukimura had worn belonged to Yozora.

'Hey, Yozoraaa ! Come up here!'

Sena called from the second floor. We made our way up towards her room.

I pondered something while I was walking.

'Hm...'

'What is it, Kodaka?'

'Um, well, it feels like I'm forgetting about something...'

'...?'

There was something in Sena's room that was absolutely unacceptable for other people's eyes...

Something that Yozora absolutely mustn't see...

'Don't just stand there, come in!'

Sena said happily as she opened the door, inviting Yozora into her room.

'Ah... yes...'

Yozora's face was a mixture of anxiety and anticipation, as she stepped into the room of a friend for the first time in her life... and then she froze in place.

'Eh? ....eh?'



Seeing the innumerable creepshots of herself, plastered all over the walls and up to the roof, frightened Yozora to the point of uncontrollable screaming:

[1] Ojousama (お嬢様) is roughly equivalent to "young mistress", while bocchan (ぼっちゃん) is roughly equivalent to "young master".

[2] I realize this idiom doesn't really exist in the English language, but the comparison should be clear enough.



# Chapter 17 - The Stars and the Sun

Two days had passed since Yozora moved in with the Kashiwazaki family.

Since Yozora was in the club room tutoring Hinata-senpai and Kobato, I asked in passing how her living in the Kashiwazaki household was going.

'Well, it's going alright. The headmaster treats me well, and recently Stella-neesan has even let me help out with her work.'

'...how are things between you and Sena?'

'...'

She made a face of annoyance that came from the very bottom of the heart.

On that day, Yozora had the living daylight scared out of her when she discovered the creepshots of her, and then flew into a terrible rage, ripping down every photo from the walls and ceiling. She also deleted the photos from the camera memory card as well as from the computer, but she still suspected Sena kept a backup.

Even though Sena asserted that 'we are friends, letting friends take a few pictures in secret won't kill you!', the distance between the two remained.

'...I can now from the bottom of my heart understand Sumeragi's feelings towards that pervert. That jerk is truly super-disgusting... or rather than disgusting, she's frightening...'

Yozora patted Kobato's head as she spoke, and Kobato nodded happily.

'For some reason, she wants to take baths together with me, and

when I'm in my room studying, she comes by bothering me, she even wants to sleep in the same room... if it wasn't for the fact that I'm living there only thanks to their charity, I would have tied her up and put her in the storeroom...'

She sighed feebly.

'...enough already, let's not speak of that super-perverted, creepshotting, stalking, crazy Meat. Stella-neesan is really amazing! I've never met such an awesome person before. Even though I'm helping her out, there's no way I can match her skills. But even when I make mistakes, Stella-neesan doesn't get angry, but instead kindly encourages me. When she's not busy with the housework, she even keeps me company playing games, drinking tea and a few days ago she even tutored me. She really is a good tutor. I think she must have been taught by some truly brilliant people.'

Yozora was praising Stella-san like crazy.

It seemed like she could really display her innermost feelings when it came to people she revered, much like Akane-senpai.

Since Yozora was a good student and a quick learner, her counterpart must have also appreciated her, in turn leading Yozora to get closer to other people, forming a virtuous cycle.

'Right, Stella-san seemingly graduated from university when she was 14! That's so cool! If I had an older sister, she would definitely be like her...'

Yozora beamed with bliss as she excitedly talked about Stella-san.

In normal cases, it was the kind of scene that would make you smile happily, but...

'Wait a minute! What do you mean 'if I had an older sister', your actual older sister is sitting right here!'

'Ahahaha, you still haven't learned how to tell jokes, Kodaka! I'm a third-year student here, how could I possibly have an older sister in the same year?'

...in Yozora's mind, Hinata-senpai had turned into a lower form of existence.

I peeked a Hinata-senpai. The hand in which she held her pen was shaking, tears forming in the corners of her eyes.

Yozora completely ignored her actual sister's pain and stood up.

'Right, it's about time for me to leave. Stella-neesan asked me to help her out. Sumeragi, Idiot: make sure your homework is done before tomorrow.'

She left the club room in a brisk pace.

'Kodaka...'

Hinata-senpai's voice was extremely pained.

'My sister's been stolen!'

'...i-if you do your best on the end-of-term exams, Yozora will surely look up to you again! ...probably.'

The only thing left I could do now was to encourage her.



A short while after Yozora had left, Sena came to the club room.

'Hey, Kodaka, have you seen Yozora?'

'She already left. Stella-san seemed to have some work for her.'

Hearing my response, Sena was clearly displeased.

She voiced a sullen 'Muuu...' and said:

'Kodaka, listen up! That jerk has really been glued to Stella lately!'

'Uh, yeah, it does seem like that.'

'I told her to have a bath together with me, but she wouldn't listen, but then she even scrubbed Stella-sans back! She even played

'Kuroneko' together with her, bought expensive pudding with her, and even let her tutor her! Stella seems to really like her too, just a few days ago she told her that "you can call me neesan", you know! Stella-san is clearly my sister-'

'Eh?'

'I-it's nothing... anyway, I think Yozora is too attached to Stella! No matter how you look at it, this is just wrong!'

...it seems that Sena wasn't just upset that Yozora was overly attached to Stella-san, she was also upset that Stella was being stolen by Yozora.

'Kashiwazaki, I know just how you feel!'

Hinata-senpai strongly approved.

'Abandoning her real sister and sticking like glue other people's sisters, that's just wrong!'

'Yeah!'

Having gained someone else's approval, Sena contentedly nodded, but then-

'...Um, what's your name?'

'Wha-!?'

Hinata-senpai was dumbstruck. I was also completely taken aback.

'You're not serious, are you? She's Hinata-senpai ! Hidaka Hinata-senpai! Yozora's sister, the president of the student council last year, held back for one year, the one we went to the hot springs inn together with!? We even played Werewolf together with her!'

After I finished my explanation, Sena spoke up:

'I remember who she is! It's just that, since I've never talked with her, I couldn't remember her name!'

...indeed, I haven't actually seen the two of them talk... if she doesn't have an interest in the other person, she doesn't even remember their name, including people with as much presence as Hinata-senpai...

Even though Sena was incredibly rude, Hinata-senpai wasn't angered, but instead dismissed it with a laugh.

'Hahaha, we certainly haven't talked before, so I can't blame you for not remembering me! Besides, I'm not good at remembering people's names or faces either.'

...it's not just people's names or faces, you're not good at remembering anything, are you?

'Then let me reintroduce myself. I am Yozora's real sister, Hidaka Hinata.'

Hinata-senpai extended her hand. Sena also extended her hand and returned the greeting.

'I am Kashiwazaki Sena. Nice to meet you.'

After that, Sena and Hinata-senpai got into complaining about Yozora together.

They were both of the unrestrained sort, so they got extremely into it.

'Gah, Yozora is just too much, if she doesn't want others to take pictures of her in secret, then she should just let them take them openly! What's there to be ashamed of!?'

'Oh, that jerk is really fussy, talking about others in that way just because of test results! If you don't get a perfect score, she'll treat you as a piece of trash!'

'Seeing each other naked is good! You're using your whole body to promote friendship!'

'Like I said, that jerk is really fussy! All those 'chie-!' and 'hmp-!' sounds she makes should be proof of that!'

What!? So Stella is that blonde woman who sometimes substitutes for

the headmaster? Our family really does rely on her for a lot of tasks. Because she wanted to stand out from other girls, she even left the student council to become an exchange student! It really is infuriating!

'When Stella brought home her boyfriend since five years, I was really scared. I heard that her boyfriend was really aggressive, completely unlike other people.'

...as a mysterious feeling of trust grew between the two of them, Sena even went so far as to invite Hinata-senpai over to her house, in order to let her see Yozora.

Seeing two people who had been isolated in school become friends like this must be a good thing... right?







# Chapter 18 - Smile

After the end-of-term exams and after the short holiday following that, only a few days had passed since the start of the new semester.

I was sitting with Maria at the bus stop, waiting for Kobato.

Today was the day the results of the middle school end-of-term exams would be revealed.

The requirement for Kobato to be moved up to the high school section of the school was that she didn't fail a single subject, and that three subjects were above the average score. The previously released results showed that she had not failed any of the tests and that her world history and classical japanese scores were above the average.

All it would take was for today's scores to include no failed tests and one test score above the average and then Kobato would (almost) certainly be able to proceed to the high school section of Saint Chronica next year.

In order to hear the result from her in person, and instead of relying on text messages, we'd decided to wait for her at the bus stop by the middle school section.

'Is there a problem? There's no problem, is there!? Even though that jerk is a pile of poop, she'll be fine, won't she? Although... that jerk is a real poop!'

Maria had been pacing back and forth by the bus stop for a while now.

'Calm down, Maria... have faith in Kobato.'

'I know, oniichan! ...it's just... that jerk is really stupid you know...

'...in that case, don't have faith in Kobato, but have faith in the you that tutored Kobato.'

'Right! I am a genius teacher after all! Since I was tasked with tutoring her, even if she's an idiot, she should be fine!'

'Right, right, right, just like that.'

'Wooow! That's great!'

I was both encouraging Maria and feeling worried, as I anxiously awaited Kobato.

And then, the bus finally pulled up and Kobato stepped out of it.

As soon as Kobato saw Maria, she spread her arms in a large half-circle.

Maria crashed into Kobato from the side, hugging her tightly.

I will absolutely never forget her smile at that moment.





# Chapter 19 - Backlighting

Every november, Saint Chronica holds a school festival, divided into a one-day sports festival followed by a two-day cultural festival.

The sports festival feels like it's the starter dish for the cultural festival. Usually, it wouldn't be busy at all at this time, but this year was definitely an exception. The situation on the battlefield was one of never-before-heard-of excitement.

Last year, the yellow team had won thanks to the insanely undefeatable Kashiwazaki Sena.

The green team had lost last year due to the student council president, Hidaka Hinata-senpai, being too busy to compete.

The red team had a very high level of intellect, and now, since Stella-san was leading them using the mysterious traditional japanese battle strategies handed down through generations in her family, and their strength had been considerably increased by the addition of Mikazuki Yozora.

Sena was leading her troops with her usual otherworldly strength, waging an all-out war with Hinata-senpai, as if she was venting all the stress accumulated from studying everyday and running amok with all her strength. Even Yozora was more pumped-up than usual, leading the troops of the red team while using her tactics to control the two others like marionettes.

Due to Sena wearing a boys uniform and tying her breasts down with a piece of cloth which came loose during the cheerleading competition, causing her breasts to spill out of her uniform. The three teams wouldn't give an inch, but the exciting battle ended with the yellow team winning. That evening, it seemed Sena was severely scolded by Pegasus-san, who had been watching the competition.

As for my and Aoi's white team and blue team, we competed for the last spot. We, too, were playing with high stakes.



On the day after the sports festival, the main event of the festival started: the cultural festival.

In the Neighbor's club, we had prepared an ever richer program than last year.

The meeting to decide the program had been just like last year's... no, even more chaotic than last year's.

Yozora had suggested shooting a movie, as she wanted payback for last year. Sena, because of a galgame she had recently been into, demanded that we form a band. Rika wanted to organize a haunted house. Maria wanted to "eat all the delicious things". Kobato wanted "the noble kin of the night to put on a sublime play". I suggested acting out a humorous sketch, but for some reason I was turned down...

Movies, band, haunted houses, restaurants: these were the real main dishes of the school festival. And to be honest, I wanted to try them all.

They were all great choices... which was why it was so difficult to choose one of them.

Since this was the last school festival celebrated together with these members, I didn't want to leave any regrets.

At that point, Maria said: 'Since we can't decide, why don't we do all of it?' which led to a breakthrough where everyone decided to go with the "let's take all the things we want to do, mix them up and do them at the same time"-plan.

And thus, the "Movie costume band restaurant by the Neighbor's Club" was born.

We would show our own movie in the restaurant, and the servers would dress up in the clothes from the movie when serving the customers. When the movie showing was over, a band would play in its stead.



This plan's requirements were extremely high, which is why we didn't just involve the Neighbor's club, but also Hinata-senpai, Sister Kate, Stella-san and Pegasus-san to help us out.

We choose to use the science classroom, with me and Hinata-senpai serving as chefs.

The movie was essentially written by Yozora.

This time, she didn't plagiarize the story, and she didn't change the script or roles in order to fulfill her own wishes either.

Named "Capable but slightly unfortunate youths who sometimes quarrel, who both deepen their bonds and fight vampires to save the princess.", it was the kind of wholesome adventure-action story that was both simple yet effective at attracting audiences, combining elements of both horror and comedy.

It seems like she had been working on this since the start of the year. No wonder the quality was so high.

The impressive part was not just the story, Rika also used CG special effects to create gorgeous action scenes with Sena and Yozora, as well as making Kobato and Maria so cute that they could cure the audience's hearts. The entire movie was of such a high quality that you could enjoy it no matter which scene you saw. Rika's CG skills were even better than last year. Besides the special effects, the skeletons, ghost soldiers and other enemies were also animated to an incredibly high standard.

The background music was the same as last time, and without getting permission she had used music from movies and games.

For the ending credits song, Rika used her industry connections in the game, anime and manga world to get singers to help us make a song, but the us six members of the Neighbor's Club wrote the lyrics.

The song title was "Be My Friend".

Contained in the middle of the festive mood was the loneliness of a time that was inevitably coming to an end, but it was just because of this that we wanted to push forth with everything that we had....

putting it like this might sound like boasting, but I think this is a super-good song.

The band members consisted of Yozora doing the lead vocals and playing guitar, Sena doing lead vocals and playing bass, Rika playing the keyboard, me playing drums, Kobato playing the castanettes and Maria playing the tambourine.

With the exception of Yozora who had played some guitar before, the other members had never played instruments, but Sena and Rika learned very quickly.

Even though we had to practice playing instruments at the same time as we shot the movie, and we ended up being ridiculously busy, I ended up practicing "Be My Friend" to a point where I couldn't screw it up.

In order for everyone to defeat the vampires, save the princess and return in triumph, the heroes were holding a festive banquet.

When the credits screen was starting the show the names of the cast members, the real-world band would start playing the ending song.

□□ Be My Friend, even if you pretend you don't know [\[1\]](#)

□□ Be My Side, I know you've already realized it

The lively singing of Yozora and Sena resonated in the packed science classroom.

Everyone had dressed up in the same clothes as we had worn in the movie, with Yozora wearing the barely-there magical witch girl costume and Sena wearing a very revealing vampire queen dress.

□□ Our time is will not last forever

□□ This moment is all we have, so let's burn it into our memories

Rika wore her light adventurer protagonist clothing, Kobato her pure white princess dress and Maria a white school swimsuit and angel wings (she played the evil spirit misleading the party of the protagonist). I was the only one not wearing my costume from the

movie, as I had just come from the kitchen, wearing an apron and a chef's hat over my school uniform rather than dressing up.

□□ One more step, I'll try getting closer to you now

□□ So I can hold your hand

Rika, while playing the keyboard, occasionally provided backing vocals, whereas Kobato and Maria were excitedly dancing around of their own volition, but everyone joined together to sing the final refrain.

□□ Be My Friend, since we've made such a long detour

□□ Be My Side, we are even now still looking towards to future

□□ One more time, let's reach out with our hands

□□ We can even touch that star

After the performance had ended, Yozora and Sena raised their fists, and gave a joyous cry towards the spectators.

...Yozora and Sena working together to create the café had become a topic of conversation even before the school festival, so the "Movie costume band restaurant by the Neighbor's Club" was crowded by people as soon as it opened its doors, and by the time the band played people had even gathered to listen outside of the classroom.

The café and movie received warm receptions, and through word of mouth, not only students but also people from outside of school came in greater and greater numbers, to the point where a long queue was formed in the corridors, and we had to start using a numbering system for the guests waiting. [\[2\]](#)

Serving customers (I cooked), performing, serving customers. We kept this sequence up from the point that the café opened to when business hours were over, whereafter we collectively collapsed on the floor.

'Aaaaaaah~~~~~! We did it~~~~~!'

Rika laid down on the floor and gave a deep sigh.

This year, everyone had helped share the work, in order to not put too large a burden on Rika, but since the overall amount of work had been greater than last year, I think her amount of work had been pretty much the same as last year.

'Yeah... we did it.'

I smiled as well, lying next to Rika.

'...Rika never would have thought that the science room could be this lively... Rika is extremely... extremely happy....'

She was breathing heavily, sweat running down her body, but with a big smile on her face.

'Yeah... I'm really happy.'

I felt a pleasant feeling of exhaustion, as well as overwhelming feelings of fulfilment and accomplishment.

Showing a movie at the school festival, running a café, playing in a band, making a whole bunch of guests enjoy themselves to their fullest.

Compared to last year's school festival, where we had furtively shown a movie with only the Neighbors club as the audience, this year we had been in the center of the school festival.

It was like playing the lead role in a school idol drama.

'Good job, Kodaka.'

Rika raised her left arm, fist tightly clenched.

'Yeah... good job.'

I raised my right arm as well, my fist clenched tightly as if I wanted to grab hold of the light above.

We lightly bumped our fists together.



It felt very natural.

I didn't feel my heart skip a beat from touching Rika, but rather felt a clear feeling of invigoration.

There was no use in trying to deceive myself.

I could honestly and frankly say that this was the feeling of friendship.

'Heeeey! Riiikaaaa! How do you turn this microphone off?'

'What's going on?'

As Yozora called out to Rika, she got up and left.

After Rika had left, I remained on the floor.

'Kodaka-senpai. You did well.'

The one who had come up to me and spoken was Yukimura.

She was wearing a uniform, with a student council armband around her upper arm.

From my viewing angle, her white underwear could be clearly seen underneath her skirt, but I didn't even have the energy left to move, so I remained in place as I replied.

'Oh... you did well too, Yukimura. Did you come see our performance?'

'Yes, although I only managed to see the last part. I ate the food you made, watched the movie and the live music. It was delicious, funny and cool, Kodaka-senpai.'

'My only contribution was the food, the movie and the music was the entire Neighbor's club's collective effort.'

'Yes.'

The corner of Yukimura's mouth formed a gentle smile.

'You look so very happy, shining brightly... so much more so than the times when you're together with me that it's dazzling.'

She said in a small voice, followed by "then, I'll be taking my leave", made a short bow and left the science classroom.



On the second day of the cultural festival, I had freed myself of student council work, so I strolled around with Yukimura, and in the evening I danced with her at the folk dance.

After the folk dance was over, the seven members of the Neighbor's Club, sister Kate and Hinata-senpai had gathered in the club room to hold a small celebration.

The "Movie costume band restaurant by the Neighbor's Club" had been awarded the first prize in the "School festival brilliant ideas competition".

The "School festival MVP" award had been won by Sena, but since this outcome had been influenced by her accidentally showing her breasts during the cheerleading competition, she was not very happy about it.

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[1] Astute readers might recognize these lyrics from the OP of Boku wa Tomodachi ga Sukunai Next (aka season 2 of the anime). I've heavily borrowed from the song translations by fansub groups Mazui and Commie to make these lyrics more recognizable to anime watchers, rather than make a literal translation from the chinese version.

[2] Some popular restaurants and cafés in Japan use a system where you get a ticket with a number when you arrive, and sometimes you can even leave your phone number. When a spot opens up, your number is called and you can enter the premises. This way you can stroll around the area while you wait instead of standing in a queue.





# Chapter 20 - The second time ~

## The situation with Rika and Yukimura ~

A short time after the end of the cultural festival, the election season for the next student council began.

'I want to run for student council president.'

Said Yukimura on the third day of the election season.

'Really? Why?'

I said in surprise. Yukimura answered calmly:

'I am very lucky to have been able to spend such fulfilling days at this school. I have both friends and a boyfriend. I am very fortunate. You could even say I am a “riajuu” [\[1\]](#) . And because of that...'

She narrowed her eyes slightly.

'Because of that... if the opportunity presents itself, I want to seize control of all under heaven. [\[2\]](#) '

'All under heaven, huh...?'

Having both friends and a boyfriend, and then becoming the president of the student council, that could definitely be called having a fulfilling school life.

'You really are stubborn... well, um... good luck!'

I gave her my heartfelt encouragement, but at the same time I was somewhat scared by her dazzling image.

'Yes. And therefore, I would like to request your recommendation.'

With this request, Yukimura's managed to make me even more

surprised.

'You want my recommendation... are you serious?'

Every candidate needed to get one person to recommend them.

On election day, all the candidates would give a final campaign speech, but before that, the people recommending them would also make speeches, in order to help them win votes. It's not inaccurate to say that this speech is important as well, but displaying "those recommended these candidates" had an even greater effect on the election outcome. The candidates being recommended by people who the students look up to conversely find it easier to garner support.

As for whether my current self would be able to gain the trust of my peers, thanks to my helping out the student council ever since the beginning of the year, as well as having Aoi come and have friendly chats with me in the classroom, the impression of me had improved a lot compared to when I had just transferred to school and when I had just returned after the suspension. When I was having PE lessons with same-year students, my classmates and boys from other classes would come talk to me as well. However, this was limited to students from the same year. Lower year students that had not been in direct contact with me were still clearly afraid of me. And when it came to the opinions of the same-year students towards me, rather than turning positive it had gone from a negative value to zero.

I was nothing like a person whom others look up to.

'...you really should go ask someone else, you know? Like Aoi.'

'I would like to request this of you.'

Yukimura fixed her gaze directly at me.

Her face was expressionless, which often gave people the impression that she was absent-minded, but having seen her face at extremely close range many times, I had clearly seen that her gaze radiated strong willpower.

I also knew that with things having gone this far, she would not back down.

And so, I had no choice but to nod assent.

'...I get it. I'll help you.'

'I'm forever indebted to you, Kodaka-senpai.'

Yukimura let out a short sigh, and then lightly stepped forward to kiss me.



The typical voting period for applying as a candidate for the student council election was one week, and if no candidates had stepped forth at that point, the application period would be extended. Last year, due to having to fill the void left by the (in terms of physical ability only) superhuman-like and ever-lively Hinata Hidaka and the academically excellent Akane who supported her, this led to no one turning out to vote for three weeks, the school was forced to have the secretary Aoi and accountant Karin assume the posts of president and vice-president for the following term.

But this time, there had unexpectedly been 25 candidates apply to run in the election.

This term's student council had been the opposite of Hinata-senpai's, as it rather than reaching out a helping hand to students in need had instead often called upon students for help. Even though it had not been as dependable as the previous term's student council, it had given the impression of being more approachable. Likely as a result from this, it led to a lot of people applying to be candidates in the election.

There are two kinds of leaders. The first kind is the superhuman type of leader who uses their strength to pull other students forward. The second kind is someone who is leader only in name, but makes other students feel that "we should support this person". I personally thought this latter type was the most fitting choice for the student council.

But let's not speak of this now.

Among the 25 candidates, Yukimura included, there were a total of

seven people running for student council president.

No matter how you looked at it, the greatest threat was Minakawa Akari.

She was the girl who replaced Karin as the secretary of the student council, a prim and proper looking beautiful girl with long black hair. Despite not being as prominent as Hinata-senpai or Sena, she was still a master of both the pen and sword, had a cheerful nature and treated people amiably. You could call her a perfect, superhuman "Mikazuki Yozora with excellent communication skills".

As Yozora was busy tutoring Hinata-senpai and Kobato, she took over the tasks that Yozora had helped out with, becoming the center pillar of the student council.

Once I heard that Akari was running for president, I ran off to consult with Yozora.

Since Yozora and Yukimura had worked with the student council, their relationship with her was good, and they thought highly of her abilities.

'...Yukimura and Akari, huh... I'd consider Yukimura's chances of winning to be rather low.'

Yozora analyzed calmly.

'Why do you think that? Yukimura has also served as the accountant for the student council for a year and has been very well-received, so shouldn't there at least be a 50/50 chance?'

This was my honest opinion, without taking her side.

'...because this year's student council is being compared to that of the idiot and Akane-senpai, people have been getting the impression of them being 'unreliable' all along. Thanks to that, the students started paying more attention to the student council's activities, and a lot of people turned up who wanted to run the student council. Usually, we would welcome something like that, but this phenomenon showed that what everyone was after was actually a "dependable student council" and a strong leader who could guide people in troubled

times.'

'...just like with Hinata-senpai last year?'

'That's right... and 'perfect superhuman well-versed in both the pen and sword coming into the student council in the middle of the term to put out fires' is just the kind of description befitting such a person. Yukimura has charmed many, but she isn't really the type to lead everyone else... or at least that's what a majority of the students think.'

We knew that Yukimura was definitely not a push-over, but when it came to the majority of the students who did not know her very well, they most probably thought she was gentle and quiet... or to put it in a mean way: "unreliable".

'...so what you mean is that Yukimura doesn't really stand a chance...'

I said in a low voice. Having heard Yozora's thorough explanation, I didn't want to acknowledge it but I had no other choice but to do so.

However, Yozora somehow gave off an unfazed smile.

'Kodaka, what are you saying?'

'Eh?'

'All you have to do is subvert people's impressions of her... Yukimura's choice of you as her recommender was no accident.'

'Uhh... okay...?'

Yozora's complete faith in me left me completely baffled.

☺

After the candidate application period had ended, and the week allocated to campaigning had also ended, the day of final campaign speeches and voting had finally arrived.

On the stage of the gymnasium, me, Yukimura, the other candidates and their recommenders were sitting in rows on folding chairs.

Since there were so many candidates, today's election would only be for the position of president, with the remaining elections being held later on.

Yukimura would be the second to last candidate speaking.

After the five previous candidates and recommenders had spoken, and the question and answer sessions had ended, the turn finally came to us.

Me and Yukimura rose and walked to the center of the stage.

The sequence was for the recommenders to speak first, followed by the candidates, which meant I would be speaking first.

'I wish you fortune in this battle.'

Yukimura said from behind as I took my place in front of the microphone.

I quietly took a deep breath and looked around the gymnasium.

The entire student body was looking at me, whispering. Indistinct phrases like "What kind of person is he, a delinquent?" and "He's a recommender?" were whispered throughout the hall.

My mind was completely empty, a crazy amount of cold-sweat running down my body.

As for me who gets nervous about simply greeting others in the classroom, this kind of task was far too much. Others were really lucky to be able to raise their heads high and speak in front of such a large audience. I couldn't help but think to myself "if someone can stand this kind of enormous pressure, they should just go be the student council president already."

I tightly grabbed the paper with my speech, not to open it, but to crumple it up inside my pocket.

Ever since I had agreed to be the recommender and until this morning, Yozora had forced me to rewrite my manuscript dozens of times.

Written in fine print on the manuscript was that I had previously been an unruly delinquent who, thanks to Kusunoki Yukimura's tender care, had turned over a new leaf, just like the story of a warm-hearted teacher or a Hellen Kelley biography. It was a work of fiction overflowing with love and emotion.

This was a tactic formulated by Yozora in order to subvert the impression of Yukimura's "unreliability". Or to put it in another way, "clear and obvious political spin-doctoring".

As long as the infamous Hasegawa Kodaka assumes a super-earnest appearance completely unlike his usual self and says "thanks to the goodness of Yukimura, I have been reformed", the students' impressions of her would change instantly.

Once the delinquent had told the story of "she made a delinquent turn over a new leaf" with his own words, the impact of this merit would most likely overshadow the other candidates' accounts of "I'm skilled at leading my club" or "I led my class to victory during the athletics festival".

However...

'No way. Absolutely no way. Rejected.'

When I gave Yukimura the manuscript that Yozora had finally been content with, she gave a vigorous rejection in a sharp tone.

'Wh-why? If I hold this speech, you might be able to defeat Akari-'

She interrupted me as I was attempting to retort.

'Using this kind of method to win makes victory meaningless. I want you to use your most genuine self to help me out.'

Right.

She had always been an honest person, and no matter how much time it cost her, she would always stick to fair and just tactics.

Being wrong didn't matter. Making mistakes didn't matter. Deceiving others didn't matter. Being ingenuine didn't matter. As long as there

was a gentle redemption, what kind of person I am was insignificant... Yukimura always attacked my twisted notions head-on.

How would a person like her ever permit me to use a story like that to deceive others?

'You really are a samurai through and through, aren't you...'

I was feeling both helpless and deeply moved.

'Because I'm an idiot.'

Yukimura shot me a dreamy smile.

...and so, we decided not to use the manuscript I had painstakingly written. Although it was somewhat ungrateful to Yozora who had been particularly helpful, I could at least use the lessons learned during this week the next time I had to write a short essay for an exam.

I forcefully made the stiff muscles in my face move and began my speech.

'Uh... um... ah-ahem!'

SCREEEECH-----!

The sonic boom of the microphone drilled straight through my eardrums, hurting to the point that I furrowed my brow. I had only used microphones in karaoke parlors before, so I wasn't yet familiar with how to control the volume.

'...I, I'm the recommender of Kusunoki Yukimura, third-year class two's Hasegawa-'

Not good, this time my voice was too quiet, the people in the back couldn't hear me. Besides, my voice was super gloomy, I can see the faces of the students sitting in the front clearly twitching.

'...I'm, I'm third-year class two's Hasegawa Kodaka.'



Alright, my voice should be something like this, I guess.

'... Uhh... how do I put this, Yukimura is, you see... she's a super-impressive person. Even though she looks like a push-over on the surface, she actually is nothing like that, eh, anyway, it's correct to say that she's amazing. When she has the opportunity to act, she acts. When she makes a decision, she has the determination to go through with it to the end. She possesses manliness! I feel she holds this kind of special quality. If you were to ask how impressive she is, then she's probably on the level of the re-real Sanada Yukimura, pretty much? Probably...'

I didn't look at my manuscript, and was so nervous that my mind became empty. The contents of my speech was a complete disaster. However, I want to believe that everyone listening could hear that I truly felt that Yukimura was amazing, that I truly felt that she was fit to lead the student council.

'I am the second-year class four's Kusunoki Yukimura, who was so graciously introduced by Kodaka-senpai just now.'

Yukimura's speech that followed was, completely unlike mine, very calm.

The contents were that she had been invited by Yusa Aoi to serve as the accountant of the student council, a task she felt was incredibly important, and so she wanted to follow up by taking on the role of president. She would continue the governing policies set out by Aoi, setup an ambitious support organization under the student council's executive branch and deepen cooperation with regular students.

Having content that could only be told by someone with real-world experience, as well as being presented in a gentle tone of voice, it was a speech that made her popular with the audience. The proof of this was that, as Yukimura finished her speech, she received from the audience the most enthusiastic applause of the day.

After this came the time for the regular students to ask the candidates questions.

The candidates' answers to these questions would likely have great

influence on the election outcome as well.

'Now then, raise your hand if you want to ask the candidate a question.'

As soon as Aoi had spoken, a person sitting close to the center of the hall raised their hand.

'Please give the floor to that student.'

In accordance with Aoi's instructions, the election organizers took a microphone and headed over to the student.

'What...!?'

Seeing who it was that had raised their hand, I couldn't help but let out my voice in surprise, frozen in place.

Yukimura was looking equally shocked, but didn't let her voice out.

The person who had raised their hand was Shiguma Rika.

She was wearing a girls school uniform, sitting on a folding chair among her classmates. Rika had always stayed apart from her class and had never attended lessons since entering school, so just why was she here...!?

Rika's classmates were equally surprised.

Rika grabbed the microphone from the election organizers and stood up.

'Well then, if you would allow Rika to pose you a question. It seems that Yukimura-san was invited into the student council by the president, and given that, I would like to ask you didn't choose the current president Yusa-senpai or a same-year friend, but instead choose Kodaka-senpai over there to be your recommender?'

'This girl is just...'

Yukimura was looking displeased by Rika's question, but gritting her teeth, she still maintained her typically calm tone of voice and gave a

frank and upright answer.

'That's because I'm currently going out with Kodaka-senpai.'

Yukimura's statement caused an uproar throughout the room, but she was completely unmoved, and went on:

'My lover Kodaka understands me better than anyone else, and is more considerate of me than anyone else, so I asked him to recommend me.'

Although her manner of speaking was calm, a provocative overtone could be clearly heard in her response. Rika picked up on the provocation and gave off a low "Oooh...", which was picked up by the microphone.

'Um, um... so, that means that Kusunoki-san has slept with Hasegawa Kodaka-senpai? A lot?'

Wha-what kind of question is that!?

I could barely stop myself from shouting out loud.

'Co-could the student asking questions please keep to topics related to the election?'

A completely crimson-faced Aoi stammered at her, but Rika, despite blushing to the same degree herself, was as calm as before.

'Rika believes that since the student council president should represent the student council, their own moral conduct and the moral standards of the school are closely related.'

'Uhyaah!? Um, err... well, maybe...?'

Aoi was immediately persuaded.

Yukimura calmly took a breath.

'...My relationship with Kodaka-senpai is still pure. We have not slept together.'

'How far have you gone!?'

'...We have kissed.'

Yukimura answered blushing, as the gymnasium erupted in shouts of "UOOOOH---!". I felt like the atmosphere had turned into one completely unrelated to political views.

'Wooo- wooo- how passionate!'

To further aggravate Yukimura, Rika answered in monotone: 'That's all the question Rika had.' and was just about to return the microphone when Yukimura stopped her.

'I also have a question for you.'

'And what's that?'

'...why are you doing this?'

Although Yukimura voice was even, her body betrayed her anger. Rika put on a brilliant smile for the classmates around her and answered:

'I'm simply picking a fight ♥'

'...is that so?'

Yukimura showed a smile cute to a degree that even I, her boyfriend, hadn't even seen, as if to counteract Rika's smile.



'...for a hikikomori himono girl like you to come here just for this must have been really hard. You should just stay in your room forever, masturbating in the dark.'

'Well, Rika is grateful for that. See you.'

The two parties kept on smiling, as the temperature in the assembly hall raced towards the freezing point. As the murderous war of words ended, Rika returned the microphone to the organizers and walked straight out of the gymnasium.

Yukimura was still smiling, but standing beside her I could see that her tightly balled fists were shaking slightly. She must have been extremely angry...

Even though Rika had been the only student asking questions, the time allotted for questions had already run out, so disregarding the chaos and confusion among the students, we left the stage.

Having seen relationships like Yozora and Sena's or Kobato and Maria's, where they'll bicker with each other as soon as they meet but actually have a friendly relationship, you'd naturally think that Yukimura and Rika are the same, but in fact they absolutely cannot stand each other.

If they had been fighting because of a boy, or because their interests did not match, if their relationship had been that easy to explain then perhaps I'd have been to intervene. But it really wasn't like that at all. What's really regrettable was, the situation wasn't that easy. There was not way for me to just eliminate the cause of it all and have them reconcile like a game protagonist.

No matter where in the world you go, you'll see exceedingly complex conflicts of minds, so presumably they would also exist here, even though I had not yet encountered them.

Interpersonal relationships really are complicated.

Back when I had no friends, I also thought that. But as I had more and more contact with others, I also felt this more and more... no, it was probably because I had finally become one of the people who could see the true nature of the 'Interpersonal relationships really are complicated' cliché.

Incidentally, the next year, after we had all graduated, Yukimura

established a "bushido club", while Rika established an "inventors' club", both of which were always in conflict with each other. After they both graduated, Yukimura shrewdly founded a development company named "All under heaven games corporation", later renamed "All under heaven entertainment company". Rika followed by setting up the "Sigma Corporation", leading to an over 10 years long childish war, that grew to encompass all of Japan's entertainment industry... the events of today were written into the history books as the first battle fought between Yukimura and Rika.



With great effort, Aoi managed to subdue the uproar that ensued after Yukimura's speech and the hall had turned quiet once again. The seventh and last candidate's recommender was just taking the stage to hold a speech.

The currently serving secretary as well as the most promising candidate, Minakawa Akari.

Recommending her was the currently serving vice-president of the student council, Jinguuji Karin.

'as everyone knows, Minakawa-san joined the student council in July this year to serve as the secretary, and has given us ample display of her abilities. If a person as excellent as her-'

Karin may have been a fairly weird person, but she hid it well on stage, providing a detailed explanation of Akari's skills and charm, as well as giving concrete examples. Her steady tone of voice called to mind the graceful movements of Japanese traditional dance, making the audience focus single-mindedly on her speech.

Following that was Akari's own speech. The contents, explaining her policy activities since joining the student council, showed her goal of forming a "reliable student council" in a way quite different to Yukimura's. She would set up a telephone hotline that anyone could use to call upon the assistance of the student council, as well as setup a support organization to help implement the concrete policies. Speaking in a resolute tone that made people get an even stronger impression of her being reliable, she received an even more

passionate round of applause than Yukimura after finishing her speech.

...no matter how you looked at it, we would lose...

I let out a sigh of despair. Although the question time having been ruined by Rika was part of the reason, if only I as the recommender had been a bit more reliable, it would have been fine. But with me being so useless, I couldn't help but feel bad about it.

'...then, please raise your hand you want to ask questions of the candidate Minakawa.'

Aoi's voice sounded a bit on edge, as the time for questions began.

'Please give the floor to that student.'

The microphone was passed to a first year girl. I didn't think Akari would have any troubles at this point, that she would be able to answer the questions perfe-

'Um, um, excuse me! May I ask just what your actual relationship with Karin-senpai is!?'

'!?'

That this kind of completely-unrelated-to-political-views kind of question would once again pop up made me instantly freeze in place.

On the stage, Akari had an astonished expression of "huh!?" plastered across her face, and Karin who was standing beside her was still bearing a graceful smile, even though she was bathed in cold sweat.

'I heard Kusunoki-senpai saying that her recommender was also her lover, and I'm guessing that your situation is the same as well! May I ask: are you going out with Karin-senpai!?'

'...I am.'

After a moment of silence, Akari nodded, her face crimson.

Where they dating!? I had clearly been working together with them



in the student council, yet I hadn't noticed anything!

'...I am going out with Karin-senpai. You may be thinking "but aren't you both girls?", but we are serious about thi-'

'How could this happen!?! Karin-senpai! You already have me!'

'Eh!?!'

Akari was in shock, looking back and forth between the girl and Karin. Karin's expression was looking more and more stiff.

At this point, another girl suddenly rose up and screamed:

'What are you talking about!?! Onee-san is going out with me you know!?!'

'Enough from all of you! Karin has already been phy-physically intimate with me many times!' 'Sen-senpai has loved me dearly several times too!' 'Karin-san is mine!' 'Stop joking around! You cheaters!' 'Hey, Jinguuji! Are you just going to throw all the rest of us away!?!' 'Didn't you say that I was the only one you loved!?!' 'My body has already become your own tailor-made board game!'

...Karin's lovers(?) appeared in succession throughout the hall.

'Qui-quiet! Everybody be quiet!'

Aoi exclaimed to absolutely no effect, after which Akari loudly exclaimed:

'Sen-senpai, what is going on here!?!'

Karin, who was having an insane cold sweat, once again assumed her smile.

'Everyone, please calm down. I love you all. You, who have cured my soul that was wounded by the rejection of a woman, are all people of immense importance to me... '

The person who Karin's gaze was affixed on, was Mikazuki Yozora.

Scared out of her wits, Yozora screamed out loud:

'Do-don't involve me in this, you pervert!'

'As expected, Senpai is still... with Yozora...'

'Were we nothing but playthings to you!?!'

'No, no, that's not it... eh, how do I put this, um...'

Karin tried to weasel her way out.

'Urgh... my stomach hurts... I-I'm going to give birth...!'

Seeming as if she had decided there was no way to find an excuse for all of this, she decided to escape.

She turned away from the direction of the audience and ran off the side of the stage in a mad dash.

'Wai-wait, senpai!'

Akari threw away the microphone and chased after her.

Karin's other lovers(?) also took up the chase.

'Eh, eeeh!? Karin! Wait! Eeeeeh~!?!'

The hall at once burst into uproar. Aoi herself was also extremely confused, and had no way of bringing back order.

'I didn't ask for a harem~!'

Karin's screams propagated from outside, as if taken straight out of a comedy manga.

...and like that, due to Jinguuji Karin causing the greatest scandal since the school's founding, there was no one free to handle the student council election.

'...what the heck are you doing...'

Deep inside, I thought "as expected, harem's aren't such a good thing

after all", but at the same time, I could see a route that I could possibly have happened to go down myself.



The aftermath of all this:

As for the results of the election, the presidential hopefuls Yukimura and Akari both lost. The four other second year candidates split the votes from the second and third year students, leading to the remaining first year boy winning by getting a majority from the first year's votes, and being elected student council president.

In addition to this, the school authorities initially planned to severely punish Jinguuji Karin for violating the public morals of the school, her 28 lovers unanimously spoke up for her, and she miraculously avoided punishment. Although I felt she was an incredibly powerful person, I also couldn't help but feel "there's something wrong with this school, isn't there?".

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[1] Riajuu means someone who leads a "fulfilling life in the real world". It's usually juxtaposed with "otaku".

[2] Yukimura's word choice here is very archaic and literary, likely meant to conjure up images of feudal Japan as well as imperial China.



# **Chapter 21 - The black witch once again blessed the small wings that walk undaunted into the light**

'Can you spend the 24th of December together with me?'

Yukimura asked me, on a lunch break one week before Christmas.

'The 24th... then, what about the Christmas party?'

Every December 24th, the school gymnasium would be used to host a Christmas party, with the incumbent student council and the next student council working together to prepare the festivities.

'In order to get the next student council used to the job, the party's preparations are almost completely done by them.'

'Is that so...'

My gaze shifted back and forth uneasily.

Christmas eve.

For foreigners, it was normal to celebrate it with your family. But in Japan, it's a holiday that is normally celebrated together by couples.

Inviting each other out in the evening, strolling through streets filled with Christmas lanterns, sharing a delicious Christmas dinner together, and then... this and that.

This was the only correct answer, the most classical way of spending Christmas.

However...

'I'm sorry, Yukimura. I already have plans for that day.'

'...plans?'

All emotions disappeared from Yukimura's face. So scary!

'N-no, of course it's not like you'll have to spend Christmas Eve alone, right!? On the evening of the 24th, the Neighbor's club is going to throw a Christmas party. I was thinking you'd want to go to the Student Council's party, so there was no way you'd have time for that...'

Even though I hadn't done anything ill-intentioned, my talking speed still reached super-high levels, as if I was trying to defend myself.

When Yukimura had heard my reason, she said:

'...is there no way to cancel your plans?'

'Cancel... hm... we've all already agreed on the date, and both Kobato and Maria are really looking forward to this...'

Even though I felt regretful, I still turned Yukimura down.

'Sleep with me on Christmas eve.'

'Wha-!?'

Her face crimson, Yukimura told the stunned me:

'...because on that day, we will have been going out for a year.'

Yukimura confessed to me on the 24th of December last year.

We had agreed to Himeko-chan's demand of holding out until a year had passed. It was a promise we had obediently abided with. Everytime we had kissed, I naturally felt as if I couldn't hold back, and everytime we had watched a movie that had shown one of those scenes, it had really been hard to bear. This restriction would be lifted on Christmas eve.

Is that so... me and Yukimura would finally... be-become one....!

My mouth turned dry and my heart started beating wildly.

But what Yukimura said next had even more shock-value.

'Otherwise, let's break up.'

'.....eh?'

I couldn't believe what she had just said. I made a sound of astonishment.

'Please spend Christmas Eve with me, instead of with the Neighbor's club. Or we break up.'

'No, no, no, wait a minute! Why do you have to go that far!? Spend Christmas together or break up, isn't that just too extreme!?'

Yukimura gave me, who was losing his head from the shock, a faint smile.

'I've been thinking since before...'

'Thinking about what!?'

'This year, Kodaka-senpai has given me so much happiness. However, I haven't been able to give you enough happiness.'

'N-no way? When I'm with you, I'm very happy, it's really refreshing, when I'm together with you I feel completely at ease... That's seriously, really what I think.'

'But, not as much as when you're with the Neighbor's club, right?'

'....!'

'I want to give back twofold the happiness that you've given me. But when you are with the Neighbor's Club, you are much more lively than when you're with me.'

'....'

I had no way of denying that.

'Bu..but why would this lead to us breaking up !? Things can just stay the same as before, the neighbour's club is the neighbour's club and you are you. If....just if, if I was relatively happy in the club, then I would also be happy with yo-'

'Time is limited, Kodaka-senpai.'

Yukmura cut me off mid-sentence.

'Up until now, you've always managed to find time to be with me. The time spent eating lunch with Rika-dono, the time spent on club activities, the time spent studying...'

'That's... we are going out, of course I would find the time!'

'I am very grateful for your kind intentions. However... the time you have left with Neighbor's club is just three months.'

'....!'

With this single sentence, Yukimura left me stunned.

It wasn't like I wasn't aware of this.

I had simply just done my utmost not to think about it.

'Spending more time with me also means that the time when you are most happy will decrease.'

'Um, well...'

'Since you are so kind, there's no way to help that you'll see me as a tool for relieving your desire in your times of need, right?'

'O-of course!'

I said, my face turning red.

'Since it's like that... I have no choice but to ask you to make a choice.'

'A choice...'



'Either we spend Christmas Eve together for the first time... or we break up properly. So please make the choice between me or the Neighbor's club. If you choose me, please embrace me on Christmas eve. When that time comes, I will offer up my body and my life in order to make you happy. However, should your choice not be me, we will break up. No matter how you treat me after that, I won't mind, but no matter what I will not allow myself to get in the way of your happiness.'

Just like when she confessed to me, Yukimura's gaze was fixed on my face, her voice calm.

I looked back at Yukimura for a long time before I could manage to force out a reply:

'... let me... think about it.'

Christmas eve was the holiday of couples.

Spending Christmas Eve together with the Neighbor's club this year would be the last one I could spend together with them, although we of course would have other chances to hold parties together.

I had been very happy together with Yukimura. I had been at ease. That she had wanted to go out with someone like me made her the greatest girlfriend.

She was a gentle but strong girl, caring for me whole-heartedly, and taking the initiative to come up with this kind of baffling request simply because she had misgivings about my happiness.

If I spent Christmas Eve with her, we would be together forever after. If I didn't, we would break up.

No matter who looks at this decision, it would be obvious what the correct choice was.

Even if you didn't look at it from the perspective of right and wrong, if I was to be honest, I wanted to do ero things with Yukimura. I really wanted to.

Cancelling the Neighbor's club Christmas party and spending

Christmas eve with Yukimura.

This was absolutely the only right choice.

Even if I was an idiot and had no social skills, I wouldn't be able to pick the wrong answer to such a simple problem.

It was impossible to make such a mistake.

Even though I thought so.

...our time is limited, Kodaka-senpai.

...the time you have left with Neighbor's club is just three months.

The words that Yukimura had uttered were reverberating throughout my head.



Then, Christmas Eve finally arrived.

'MERRY CHRISTMAS!'

Everyone's voices rang out in energetic harmony, but our party poppers still fired in an uneven "pop... pop-pop, pop, pop... pop..." rhythm. It was a sad display.

In the middle of the club room stood a large China fir [2] tree tall enough to almost touch the ceiling. Decorative lights had been winded several hundred times around the tree, in addition to cotton, pine cones and other Christmas decorations. There were also teru teru bouzu dolls [3] , various anime and manga figures, plastic robot models, potato chip bags, spectacles, eroge discs as well as other immoral things hung from the tree. As for the crown of the tree- the place where you'd usually place the star- we had, due to all the stars of a fitting size having been sold out, been forced to substitute the star with a toupée. It really made you ask yourself if this could really still be called a Christmas tree.

Stuck up on the walls were colorful decorations as well as a large number of socks. But it wasn't the kind of large socks that you'd put

up for Santa to put presents in, but rather normal socks and knee-high socks, as well as, for some reason, a pair of tights.

There were snacks like potato chips and Pocky on the table, as well as dishes like karaage and paella. In the middle of the table, there was a charred whole chicken... since it was the first time I'd made this dish and since I couldn't concentrate, it became the most unsuccessful dish I had served in a long time.

It was December 24th, seven in the evening.

I was in the Neighbor's club's room.

Yozora had draped a black cloak over her shoulders, with a pointed hat on her head and make-up that made her look like a witch. Sena was dressed as Santa, but with a mini-skirt. Rika was wearing a super-large starred wig. Kobato was wearing a red gothic lolita dress and Maria was wearing clothes with reindeer imprints. As for myself, I was dressed up as Santa Claus.

...if you want to laugh, then laugh. If you want to cry, then cry.

Giving up on the opportunity of doing this and that with a super-cute girl, standing right here, holding an unfortunate Christmas party with an overwhelmingly strong handmade feeling, was a super-big idiot.

Eating snacks, singing karaoke on the PS3, playing a train-related board game and exchanging gifts.

Completely lacking changes, it was presumably the kind of scene that you'd see all across the world, lively and happy- simply a normal, lively and happy Christmas party.

'Cheer up! I have another present for you all!'

After we had finished exchanging presents, Yozora suddenly made this declaration.

'A present? You still have one left?'

Yozora grinned at the confused club members, and jogged over next to one of the wardrobes in the corner of the club room, throwing

open the doors with a loud shout:

'We have a new member joining us!'

....!?

An expressionless girl wearing a maid outfit slowly stepped out of the wardrobe- it was Kusunoki Yukimura.

'Yu-yukimura!?'

At seeing such an unexpected sight, my voice went completely off-pitch.

Yukimura gave me a faint smile, and bowed towards the rest of the equally surprised club members.

'...your humble servant has shamelessly returned.'

Yozora patted Yukimura on the shoulder, and with happiness coming from the very bottom of her heart said:

'This very girl, Kusunoki Yukimura, was unbelievably dumped by her boyfriend no less than three days before Christmas! Ahaha, what an real-unfulfilling person! You won't find a girl this unfortunate even if you searched all over the world! She's even more unfortunate than us! Ahahahahaha-serves-you-right!'

'Uh-uuuuh...'

Yukimura's shoulders were shaking slightly, as Yozora mocked her relentlessly, and then turned towards the club members to ask:

'This kind of exceptionally non-ria juu talent is no doubt just the kind of person who would fit in with us! Right?'

'Eh, um, yeah... if something like that happened to me, even I would cry.'

Sena could truly sympathize with her.

'Hehehe...'

Kobato's face was awash with complex emotions, as she gave off a nervous snicker.

'Ahaha, Yukimura is so pitiful!'

Maria probably hadn't understood anything.

Rika said nothing, but regarded Yukimura with a look of intense kindness, the corners of her mouth raised. Yukimura looked so annoyed at this that her cheeks twitched, but ultimately returned the smile.

'Alright! Now then, let us give a warm round of applause to welcome Kusunoki Yukimura!'

The club members applauded vigorously.

Still left with some doubts, I caught Yukimura's gaze, we gave each other an ambiguous smile.

I had worried about this for days, so when I told Yukimura my answer, I thought I had already definitely prepared myself to never see her again...

'Now then, Yukimura! Say a few words to serve as your acceptance speech, will you!'

Yozora gave the microphone to Yukimura, who took a deep breath and-

'Death to riajuu□□□□!!'

On this holy Christmas night,

Kusunoki Yukimura gave a rallying cry from her very soul, that echoed throughout the entire church.



# Chapter 22 - Heroine

It was the first day of the New year. Me, Kobato and Dad had been invited to the Kashiwazaki residence for a New Year's dinner.

Pegasus-san, Sena, Stella-san and Yozora were also present.

Pegasus-san was wearing a patterned haori and hakama [1] , while the three women were wearing beautiful kimono . The Hasegawa family was the complete opposite, with me and Dad wearing casual clothes that were extremely, ridiculously far from formalwear, while Kobato was wearing a sweater instead of her usual gothic lolita clothing.

Yozora had already been living at the Kashiwazaki residence for almost four months. I heard that she occasionally went home, but still remained at the Kashiwazaki residence, which likely indicated that the issues between her and her mother had still not been solved.

'...Now then, Yozora.'

As we were dining, Pegasus-san suddenly put down his chopsticks and spoke up in a serious tone of voice.

'Whash ish it?'

Yozora, who was struggling to chew a mochi from the mochi soup [2] , looked towards Pegasus-san.

Pegasus-san waited for Yozora to swallow the cake and then continued:

'Would you like to officially become a child of the Kashiwazaki family?'

Yozora's eyes widened in surprise. Me and Kobato were also shocked, but Dad, Sena and Stella were unmoved, silently watching Yozora, likely because they had discussed the matter with Pegasus-san beforehand.

'Eh? Um... eh?'

Pegasus-san calmly spoke to the flustered Yozora:

'What I mean is, would you like to become an adopted daughter of the Kashiwazaki family?'

'An adopted daughter...'

'I know it is out of line to do so, but I looked into your family circumstances. Forgive me, but... I'm going to speak frankly. I must say that your mother lacks the competence to be a mother. Considering your future, I felt it best that you should come into our family as an adopted daughter. It's not just mine, but also the wish of Sena... but naturally you need not answer now. Think it over carefully and-'

'No.'

Yozora interrupted Pegasus-san, speaking succinctly and without hesitation.

'Even though this is a rare opportunity, please accept my refusal.'

'Why!?'

Sena was very agitated by this.

Yozora smiled.

It was a gentle smile, rather than one of having given up everything.

'Even though she's that kind of person, she's still my mother. I've had other opportunities to leave her in the past. I had one when my parents divorced... and when I worked part-time in a used bookstore before, the owner offered to adopt me as well. However, I don't want to reject all the choices I've made up until now. No matter how many times I'm hurt, no matter how many mistakes I make... I absolutely don't want to betray myself.'

...because that's who I am.



'And furthermore...'

Yozora glanced mischievously at Sena.

'There's absolutely no way I want to become Sena's little sister.'

'You... you little...'

Sena was pouting, looking like she was about to fly into a rage.

...this was truly the attitude Mikazuki Yozora had towards life.

Awkward [3] to the extreme and no matter how much it hurt her, she always stuck to the path she herself had chosen.

Aaah, damn it, she's too cool.

She was just like the heroine of a story.

In the eyes of someone like me, who was unable to before the hero, she appeared so bright and dazzling that it was impossible to look at her directly.

At that point, Stella-san spoke up.

'Well, Yozora doesn't need to become an adopted daughter of our household. Sooner or later she will become my successor, serving the Kashiwazaki household as a butler. In this way, she'll be covertly controlling the Kashiwazaki family, their lands, money and authority hers to use as she desires... that will truly make her a winner at life.'

'EEH!? Is-is that true!?!'

'Wai-wait a minute, Stella! Why haven't I heard anything of this!?!'

Stella-san ignored the utter shock of Sena and Pegasus-san, sending a childish smile towards Yozora.

'...How about it?'

'...Well. Rather than being the ojousama of a rich family, I prefer the role of someone covertly controlling them.'

Yozora delightedly raised the corner of her mouth.

...Later on, this became known as the start of the prologue of Mikazuki Yozora's legend as the 'Secret grand chancellor of the Kashiwazaki family' who would shake up the world of politics...

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[1] Haori and hakama are traditional jackets and trousers worn as formalwear. Haori are traditionally patterned with the family or clan insignia of the owner, but modern ones can have other kinds of decorative imagery.

[2] Mochi is a form of glutinous rice cake is rice that is incredibly rubbery in its consistency. The closest comparison to western food is somewhere between fudge and refrigerator-chilled honey or syrup.

[3] The source uses the word 笨拙 which the dictionary translates to "clumsy, awkward, stupid". I personally think these three words have significantly different meanings, so take your pick depending on what your views of Yozora are. I personally think "stubborn" would have fit the context, but I decided against it to prevent my own opinions from influencing the translation.



## Chapter 23 - Parting words

After the end of the winter holiday, the Neighbor's club had no time to get together for club activities.

Even so, we still got together in the club room after school. The third year students among us were absorbed by our studies, Kobato was being tutored by Maria in order to avoid failing the final exams. Yukimura, who was once again wearing a maid outfit, was helping us by serving coffee. Rika was seemingly bored, but as if inspired by our studying, she was immersing herself in BL doujinshi [2] .

The result was that I managed to completely fulfill the requirements for the private university that I had applied to just in case, but I also managed to deftly pass the entrance tests [3] for my number one choice of public university.

The university that Yozora took the tests for was the toughest one in the region, but I was convinced she would pass. After graduation, it seemed she planned to study at the university alongside her on-the-job training with Stella-san at the Kashiwazaki residence. The balancing act of university life and a butler's work was a problem she would have to find a solution for.

As for Sena, she surprisingly chose the same university and the same discipline as I had chosen. Although the average scores needed for my first choice of school was above average, it was honestly far below her level. The student counsellor, Pegasus-san, Stella-san, Yozora and I had all told her to reconsider, but she did not listen.

'I've already told you, haven't I? I will definitely get what I want. So you had better make up your mind, Kodaka.'

Sena smiled like a beautiful beast, and I thought to myself: 'I'm no match for this person, huh...' It certainly felt like I was surrendering without putting up a fight... but I realized I was fine with that.

Kobato also did well at the final exams and would be able to proceed to the high school section of the academy in the coming year.

Maria would continue teaching in the high school section in the coming year as well.

Hinata-senpai managed with much effort to pass the exams, and was finally able to actually graduate.

Aoi decided to go study at a private university in Kansai, while it seemed Karin decided to go to a university in Hokkaido [4] .

Kate had one month prior decided to leave the monastic life of a nun, and gone to work part-time for a restaurant, a moving firm and a household electronics store, combining money-making with studying the "skills and knowledge of use in a household". I honestly don't know what she's up to...

Everyone had decided what paths they would take. As if to treasure the remaining days together, every day we spent together was both lively and happy...

And then, graduation day finally arrived.

After the end of the final graduation ceremony, me, Yozora and Sena went to the Neighbors club room together.

After a while, Rika, Yukimura, Kobato and Maria also came by.

On graduation day, why don't we hold a graduation ceremony in the Neighbors club as well?

The one who came up with this idea was Shiguma Rika, who studied in the science room instead of participating in the normal graduation ceremony.

We all naturally gave our approval, and so we were now just about to begin a graduation ceremony that had only seven people participating.

There were three graduating students and three remaining students sitting opposite to each other at the long table, with the adviser Maria sitting at the head of the table.

'Now then... for the farewell address to the graduating students.

Representing the student body: Shiguma Rika.'

'Yes!'

Serving as the master of ceremonies, Yukimura's tone of voice was flat. Rika got up from her seat and began her speech.

'Um... what to say... Ahaha ... even though Rika herself came up with the idea to hold this graduation ceremony, Rika still doesn't know what to say for a farewell address.

She gave a shy laugh.'

'...Err... um, as everyone knows, Rika studies in the science room, and never ever shows up in class... except once when Rika snuck in among my classmates in order to fight with Yukimura... well, you could almost call that never, right... so as far as Rika is concerned, the time Rika spends in the science classroom and in the Neighbors Club basically makes up Rika's entire school life. Ahaha ... if it wasn't for the Neighbors Club, Rika would have stayed in the science classroom alone all the time... no, Rika would definitely have stopped feeling like going to school midway and dropped out, you know... just thinking about it makes Rika tremble with fear...'

Rika was still smiling, but in the corners of her eyes, tears were welling up.

'Yozora-senpai. Thank you for founding the Neighbors Club. Rika is sorry for saying all those over-the-top things to you... thank you.'

She bowed deeply towards Yozora. Tears welled up in Yozora's eyes, and she sniffled.

Rika raised her head, and turned her gaze on me.

'Kodaka.'

'....'

'Ko...daka...'

'...Yeah.'

The tears welling up in Rika's eyes finally started flowing down her cheeks.

'Meeting you was truly great. Please continue being friends with Rika after graduating.'

With my vision blurred by tears, I looked at Rika's tear-covered face and smiled.

'...Does that even need to be said?'

I replied softly, as I spent a great effort to maintain my smile.

'Um... representative of the student body, Shiguma Rika! Aaah... so embarrassing!'

She made a bow and quickly returned to her seat, slumping forward on the table.

'...as far as fujoshi's go, that was pretty well-spoken.'

Yukimura whispered. Rika seemed as if she would start a quarrel, but remained slumped on the table, murmuring: 'Shut up... seriously...'

...But even so, the rims of Yukimura's eyes were also red.

'...Then, next up is the thanksgiving address from the graduating students. Representing the graduating students, Kashiwazaki Sena.'

'Eh!? Me? Why does it have to be me?'

Sena asked Yukimura in astonishment.

'I simply selected you based on your grades.'

'I-I definitely don't want to give a thanksgiving address, that's so embarrassing I could die.'

A graduating student representative refusing to give a thanksgiving address, this was truly an unprecedented event.

...Well, it's all because we didn't decide on who would make the addresses beforehand.

'Let Yozora hold the thanksgiving address instead! Words are the only thing you're good with anyway!'

'N-no way! That's super-embarrassing! How about Kodaka?'

When Yozora suggested me, I vigorously shook my head.

'I- I don't want to! ...I'm really no good at holding speeches in front of others...'

Damn, the horrors of the election speech assembly were flashing in front of my eyes.

'...With everyone being so afraid of losing face and embarrassing themselves, then how does that reflect on Rika who actually did hold a farewell address...'

Rika had raised her head, eyes red-rimmed as she glared at us.

At that point, Yukimura spoke up:

'..Since the graduating students all refused to give the thanksgiving address, the thanksgiving is now over. Rika-sama's farewell speech fell on deaf ears. Hahaha-serves-you-right.'

'Oi! Yukimura, you bastard, you wanna take this outside with Rika!?'

Her tone of voice changed to that of a yankee, but Yukimura ignored her completely.

'Then, for the final part, the teachers will address the student body. Maria-sama, would you kindly?'

'Ahh~ You are all beyond help~'

Voicing her annoyance, Maria stood up and spoke:

'Hmm... about that... ah? To be honest, you are all poop.'

'Why you little...'

Yozora smiled bitterly.



'...In fact, though~ I was a bit of a poop before as well. I am a genius, so I still got into high school, but at that time I was a bit of a poop, so made some... a few... extremely many mistakes.'

Maria smiled while recounting this miserable past, but seemingly with some nostalgia.

'You are all poop, so in the future you will also make mistakes. Since even a genius like myself is like this, you retards will definitely be even worse.'

Her smile turned more and more kind.

'...however, the day will come when you will probably... definitely be able to surpass these difficulties completely. No matter what challenges you encounter, they will be of no consequence to you. I am a genius, so what I say cannot be wrong. You are all poop, so the mistakes you make will be more numerous than for normal people, and you will keep on making mistakes in the future. But that also means that you are able to become even stronger than normal people. What I say is absolutely without fault. Having been able to spend this regrettable youth with you, has made me extremely pleased. It's been super-fun!'

The advising teacher of the Neighbors Club, Takayama Maria, gave us a part-nun, part-teacher... and part-person-who-looks-forward gentle smile, giving us parting words of advice and encouragement.

'Mikazuki Yozora.'

'Kashiwazaki Sena.'

'Hasegawa Kodaka.'

Text in image: Congratulations on graduating. I wish you all an ever bright future.



卒業おめでとう。

君たちの未来が  
輝かしいものでありますように。

' Congratulations on graduating. I wish you all an ever bright future.'

Looking back at our past, we hadn't overcome any crises , we hadn't united to achieve any great accomplishments through immense efforts, we haven't even solved any serious problems.

Each one of us had climbed over not-that-tall walls in order to grow, just like any other people in the world. We hadn't broken the rules to solve problems like the heroes of novels, but had rather found the terms of compromise inside our hearts, which with the passage of time had gradually become diluted.

This group of people who for unclear reasons had gathered together, confronted with the difficulties of interpersonal relationships, love, entrance exams, family relationships and so on. The kind of problems that can be found anywhere you look, and just like for normal people, some of them could be solved and others remain unsolved. Just like normal people, we spent our days like we wanted... this was the entirety of our youth.

A youth of regrets.

A youth of mistakes.

Perhaps this is the way it should be.

Perhaps this is the way it should be... but...

This doesn't prevent me from feeling lonely after parting at all.

This doesn't prevent these tears from forming in the corners of my eyes at all.

The sounds of seven people weeping resonated through the clubroom.

After Maria had spoken, Yozora was the first one to break down in tears. Sena and Rika started crying just after her, while Yukimura and Kobato were quietly sobbing. Maria then said 'just what am I going to do about you all?', her expression gentle, eyes brimming with tears.

I was the only one remaining seated with my back straight.

Even though no one else approved of us or understood us, and said

we were pitiful, I still wanted to smile and shout out loud:

Our youths are definitely fulfilling!



# Chapter 24 - Rather than saying that this is the end, it's better to say that it's an appendix or perhaps something like an appetizer.

Let me tell you upfront that this is an illusion.

I suddenly realized that we were all on a small southern island [\[1\]](#) .

Although the word "small southern island" can mean many things, the image that most often appears in people's minds is that of the tropics, coconuts, straw-skirt dancing and the like, that kind of midsummer paradise, which was just what this was.

We in the "Neighbors Club" are currently enjoying this kind of paradise.

I was sunbathing, sitting in a sunchair the beach.

Maria, who was wearing a white school-swimsuit, and Kobato, who was wearing an incredibly revealing low-waist bikini, were peacefully building a sandcastle.

'Aniki, do you want a glass of juice?'

I looked to my side for the person who spoke to me, and saw Yukimura, who was dressed in a skirt and a cute two-piece swimsuit, holding a glass decorated with a fruit containing tropical juice, smiling kindly at me.

'Sure, thanks.'

I took the glass offered to me by Yukimura and drank. The mix of rich and mellow sweetness and fresh taste made it truly delicious.

Not far away from me, a girl wearing glasses with a glass of juice in her hand was reading a book.

The name of the girl was Shiguma Rika. Her hair was gathered in a ponytail and she was wearing a one-piece swimsuit. For some unknown reason, she was also wearing a white lab coat on top of this.

She was reading a Unicorn Gundam x EVA first edition doujinshi.

I looked away towards the sea, where two girls were happily playing in the water.

'Ahaha, take that~♥'

'Iyaaa! It's so cooold~♥'

The beautiful girl wearing a brightly colored imprinted bikini, with blonde hair and blue-eyes and sporting a beautiful body was Kashiwazaki Sena.

The raven-haired girl playing together with her was Mikazuki Yozora.

The words "sexy", "cute" or "moe" were completely inappropriate for describing the black-and-white striped swimsuit covering Yozora from her calves to her neck.

The smiles and wild laughter of the two beautiful girls was downright picturesque. Just watching it from the sidelines made my heart beat faster.

...even if there were some weird parts, our current situation was definitely the so-called real-fulfilment [\[2\]](#) .

Such a lot of real-fulfilment.

An immensely beautiful real-fulfilment.

'...Ahaha... real-fulfilment is so amazing... I'm so happy, hahaha... everyone in the club is getting along so well... ahahahaha....'

However, like I said in the beginning, this is an illusion.

'-pai! Kodaka-senpai, wake up... hey!'

BZZ-BZZ-BZZT!!!

' !!?'

My body jerked as if hit by lightning, and my wandering consciousness was immediately brought back into reality.

By the way, when I said "my body jerked as if hit by lightning," I wasn't making an analogy. It was definitely a real electrical shock.

The culprit who used a taser to bring me back to reality was sitting next to me.

Now that I think back, it was always her: Shiguma Rika, who'd bring the easily perplexed, worrying, prone-to-escaping and easily misled me back to reality.

'Ah-ah-ah... why would only you alone be allowed to witness such wonderful illusions at your own leisure, hm? That's just too sneaky of you, Kodaka-senpai.'

Rika's face bore a slightly insane but stiff smile, her voice icy.

She painstakingly emphasized the word "senpai", as if she wanted to inscribe it deep within her heart, likely because this was the last time we would be in a senpai-kouhai relationship inside the same school.

'...I saw such a happy illusion...'

I said, looking into the distance.

'What kind of illusion?'

'Yozora was playing with Sena, and it seemed like they were getting along.'

'That's a truly unscientific scene.'

'Did you really have to go that far to dismiss it...'

But what Rika said was right.



There was no way those two would be happily playing together.

Meanwhile, in the real world...

'You're almost done for, aren't you? I advise you to surrender while you still can, Meat...'

The raven-haired girl, Mikazuki Yozora, had bloodshot eyes.

'Ah-ah-ah... isn't it you who should be giving up? Seeing as you're already out of breath.'

The blonde-haired girl, Kashiwazaki Sena, had eyes just as bloodshot as Yozora's, but wore a smile brimming with insanity.

The two of them simultaneously thrust their chopsticks in the hotpot sitting between them, pulling out black "somethings" and simultaneously putting them in their mouths.

'Urgh...!'

'Ueeh...!'

Both of them involuntarily made croaking noises. It seemed as if both them totally won the grand prize [\[3\]](#) .

'Ho-ho-ho-ho-hooooot!'

Yozora clutched her throat in pain.

'Uuu... uuuurgh... it's sweet... but not too sweet... it's sticking to the inside of my mouth... it feels like my throat is slowly rotting... it's so disgusting...'

Sena's eyes were rolling backwards, tears streaming.

...the place we were in had turned into hell on earth.

Before this activity started, this had still been a neat and tidy western-style room.

The seven members of the Neighbor's club had gathered around the table in the center of the room.

On the table had been placed a large pot, the contents of which were completely black. It was currently bubbling with a blub-blub-like sound.

Rika was sitting to my right, and to my left was Maria and Kobato were passed out.

'...Oniichan... Oniichan... a demon, there's a demon that wants to come out...'

'Get out of the way, Anchan. I can't kill that jerk like this...'

The two of them were both seemingly having nightmares, mumbling in their sleep with pained expressions.

Rika was sitting next to Yozora.

Kobato and Maria were sitting next to Sena.

Flanked by Sena and Yozora was a kouhai wearing a maid-uniform: Kusunoki Yukimura.

Yukimura was silent, robotically moving the chopsticks clutched in her hand from the pot to her mouth over and over again.

She was just going through the motions however, as her chopsticks had not been picking anything up for a while.

Yukimura's eyes were blank, just like those of a dead person's.

'...Yukimura... even you're a goner, huh...'

I mumbled to myself, with a sorrowful expression.

'Hey, Kodaka, you should eat too...'

'Hahaha... hurry up and eat! This competition is just getting started...'

Yozora and Sena said excitedly.

'Uuuh...'

I reached out towards the steaming hotpot with my chopsticks, feeling like I was about to start crying.

The pot was giving off a surprisingly bad smell, both sweet and rotten and sour, a stench that gave a prickling sensation on the skin, making people's eyes and noses itch and hurt. In short, it really made people feel weird.

'...um, are we sure this hotpot isn't poisonous?'

'It shouldn't be, Kodaka-senpai... Rika's poison detection device can flawlessly detect any poisons. It should be flawless, probably...'

Rika didn't have much confidence.

What we were up to? We were having a dark hotpot.

It had all started a few days earlier.

Given the gloomy mood of our graduation, we wanted to do something special as the neighbors club after the conclusion of the graduation ceremony, an activity that everyone could merrily take part in. As we were discussing what to do, Sena was playing a dating game with a "Friends having a hotpot party"-scenario. When Yozora saw this, she mumbled: '...eating hotpot together really feels like friendship, that would be great.'

Me and Sena agreed.

Yozora then said:

'In order to avoid messing up when we eat hotpot together with friends, why don't we first do a club rehearsal of eating hotpot?'

...a rehearsal for when we have made friends.

Yozora was intentionally using a phrasing I hadn't heard in a long time, a phrasing that had long since lost it's original meaning. It signified that this was the final activity organized by the Neighbors Club.

Coming back to the main topic, the phrase "eating hotpot together with everyone" honestly was really attractive, so much so that me and the others who were present all voiced approval. University students really gave off a feeling of eating hotpot together from dawn to dusk in dorm room, and in the capacity of someone who would be a university student next month, I wanted to experience this feeling in advance.

As we were discussing what sort of hotpot to make, Sena said: 'I want to make a dark hotpot'.

It seemed that other games also scenarios with good friends making hotpot together. A scene of everyone shrieking and eating hotpot seemed really blissful.

As we listened, we couldn't help but feel 'that seems like so much fun'. Besides, a dark hotpot had a kind of special feeling of some that only close friends could do, so it felt especially suited to the Neighbors Club. That is what I thought.

After deciding to make a dark hotpot, I was, as the only one in the Neighbors Club who could cook, put in charge of making the soup.

During the weekend, I started making the black soup for the dark hotpot.

The reason for dark hotpot being called dark hotpot is that you turn off all the lights in the room before adding your ingredients. It was not necessarily that the soup itself needed to be black, however I misunderstood this part.

In short, I used cuttlefish juice and black sesame seeds as the base, succeeding in making a delicious, slightly spicy and rich in seafood-flavor "Black Soup". On Monday, the day of the graduation ceremony, I got help from Rika in bringing a pot for the soup. We turned off the lights of the club room, tossed in all the ingredients we had brought at the same time and finally got the dark hotpot party started.

...which brings us to the present.

My painstakingly made black soup had started emitting an

indescribably bad odor, and although it's color was still black, it had turned into a suspiciously swamp-looking different kind of substance.

Obviously, it was forbidden to put in inedible things, as well as poisonous substances, so why was it that I had been hallucinating just now...

Before putting everything in the hotpot, everyone had been really happy, but as the pleasant smell of seafood had started turning into a foul stench, the smiles disappeared from everyone's faces without a trace.

When everyone was picking things out of the hotpot, the mood got even worse.

Maria and Kobato, the two juniors, held out for ten minutes before falling in battle.

Yozora and Sena, on the other hand...

'This is all because you wanted to do sick things like having a dark hotpot...!'

'Wasn't it actually you who said you wanted to do it!?'

'The bigger problem here is that you brought salty pickled herring!'

'Herring doesn't taste bad though! Not compared to your mango and strawberry daifuku mochi!' [\[4\]](#)

...and like that they kept passing on the blame.

They had unwittingly instituted the inexplicable rule of "last man standing wins".

By now, even Yukimura was gone.

Fortunately, I had thus far managed to only pick out relatively normal foodstuffs like meatballs and konjac (which I had brought myself), so I had managed to survive until now, but the disgustingly sweet smell that had just now permeated the club room had caused me to cross over into paradise.

Rika, with her idiotic sense of taste, was still alive, but her eyes had already glazed over, so I'm not sure if that was a good thing or a bad thing...

Me and Rika simultaneously thrust our chopsticks into the hotpot, picking out two pitch-black "somethings", and reluctantly put them in our mouths.

...the taste of the soup was extremely disgusting, but the foodstuffs weren't bad... it was just... just a bit... just what was it? Judging from the texture of it in my mouth... cauliflower?

It looked like Rika had gotten something fearsome.

'...based on Rika's memory, the closest thing to the taste of this object is... disinfectant.'

Having uttered this sentence, Rika stopped moving.

'...even you...?'

Dark hotpot is, as expected, something that truly intimate friends can happily and harmoniously make together.

For people so far removed from "happy and harmonious" such as ourselves, it's best to not even touch on that topic.

Not only that, but our club members are among the top of the line when it comes to skills for mischief. What they brought was nothing but marshmallows, fruits, snacks and other ingredients carefully selected with the intent of causing various effects.

Just why did I think "this seems like fun" back then...

I felt a lot of regret.

'Well then, for the next round...'

'I know...'

Yozora and Sena were glaring at each other, cold sweat seeping down their bodies, both wearing frightening grins.

Helplessly pressured, I also picked up my chopsticks, and the three of us together thrust our chopsticks into the hotpot to pick out it's contents.

The two of them simultaneously put the things in their mouths and swallowed-

'...oh... ooh... oooooooooooooooooooooeegh!'

'Whoa!?'

Sena vomited!

Witnessing this at close range, Yozora for an instant broke into a prideful grin, but in the next second, her complexion instantly turned pale and-

'...Uu... uooo...'

She vomited as well.

And with that, their eyes rolled back in their heads and they lost consciousness.

'Whoa! Hey, are you two really okay!?'

...No answer.

...Urgh... even the vomit is black... disgusting...

Even I felt like I would soon vomit, so I quickly threw open the windows and breathed in the fresh outside air.

'Breath in... breath out... breath in... breath out...'

After having focused on just breathing, and in order to clean up various things, I left the club room to get some cleaning rags.

What do I do about this... those two even threw up on the rug...

I walked out into the corridor, and absentmindedly raised my head to look at the plaque on the door.

'Counselling room 4.'

Up until it had turned into hell, a room strewn with corpses, this had been the clubroom of the Neighbors Club.

The Neighbors Club.

The goal of our activities were to "make friends".

The contents of our activities include all kinds of things. It's perhaps better to say that they simply lack in consistency. Sometimes we would just find ways to pass the time ourselves, while at other times we simply chatted, played video games, created games, wrote novels, drew manga, practiced instruments, acted, tried making jokes, practiced conversing with strangers or made dark hotpot.

We met in this place, both laughing and crying, sometimes quarreling with each other and sometimes helping each other, with some of us feigning ignorance, some falling in love and some becoming heart-broken.

We had done it all here.

The future would certainly have various events in store for us, we might encounter many other people, make friends with some of them, fall in love with some of them, perhaps even create families with some of them. But I felt that, no matter how much time passed, I will never forget the time we had all spent here.

Together we had spent close to two years of our unfortunate youth. If you were to create a headline for these days of our lives, I thought, then how about "I have few friends"?

I have few friends.

They are few indeed, but they are still there.

For outside observers, it must seem sad, a youth just as pitch-black and muddled as the dark hotpot.

But if you ask us, this period of time had been extremely valuable, a time that would glitter inside our hearts for the rest of our lives.



This was no illusion, it was definitely imprinted in there:

An outline that reads: "Forever in our hearts (regrettably)."

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[1] A small southern island likely refers to one of the Ryukyu islands around Okinawa, a popular travel destination for Japanese vacationers. Think of them like the Hawaii of Japan.

[2] This is essentially my anglicized interpretation of the verb-form of the word *riajuu*.

[3] Win the grand prize (中奖) is a Chinese euphemism (and perhaps also Japanese?) that roughly means being the sole person in a group to accidentally get the spiciest part of the dish (e.g. a full grain of pepper or an jalapeno).

[4] Round glutinous rice cakes with various sweet fillings. The "daifuku" in the name means "great luck".



# Afterword

Ahh, what a nice youthful life! A million letters just to write a single word.

Speaking of which, as said before, this single book serves as the epilogue, "Boku wa Tomodachi ga Sukunai" Volume 11. This long journey spanning 11 books was way beyond what I expected before.

In the end, I've managed to push through the ending that I have planned since the very start without any problems. The conclusion of a youthful life in a school setting was what was important to me personally. Pulling off what seemed funny to the readers but is actually a serious story about the adolescent life of Kodaka, Yozora and the others... did I manage to pull it off? Without the help of my illustrator Buriki-san, my work wouldn't have taken off as far as it is now. To the end, I thank you for everything.

To my first editor Kurita-san, my second editor Iwaasa-san, and my third editor Oorui-san, as well as everyone involved who remain fired up to the end, thank you for your hard work. It was nice meeting you guys.

Also, to the people involved in the manga, the anime, the LN and the movie, you all have been a great help to me. Working with everyone has been a great experience for me, and I had lots of fun. Especially the insert song, "FLOWER", which I will cherish my whole life.

And, above all, I thank you, Dear Readers. You've been here all this time, and you've supported me all the way, no exaggerations. Thank you. I hope from deep in my heart that everyone will have a bright, dazzling future ahead of them.

Although this story ends here, Itachi's comic serialization is still continuing, so please keep on looking forward to it. The omake section in the tankoubon will include a commissioned commentary.

Also, with the help of Shogakukan Gagaga Bunko's Iwaasa-san and Kantoku, who had collaborated with me in "Boku wa Tomodachi ga

Sukunai Universe", I've started a new work entitled "Imouto Sae Ireba ii.", which currently has two volumes. I've poured the experiences and feelings I've encountered into this story, so you can consider it to be Haganai's "child work" or something like that. From "Haganai" (ha ga nai, "no teeth") to "Ireba" ("dentures"). A new youthful life begins. By the way, the abbreviations are completely unintentional.

While singing to the tune of "FLOWER",

Yomi Hirasaka



# Credits

Translation Group: [RundownPaper4](#) & [BlackHandScan](#)

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